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BY INTERVENTION OF PROVIDENCE
TEX: A CHAPTER IN THE LIFE OF ALEXANDER TEIXEIRA DE MATTOS
WHILE I REMEMBER

THE REDEMPTION OF MORLEY DARVILLE

A NOVEL

By

STEPHEN McKENNA

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THE REDEMPTION OF MORLEY DARVILLE

CHAPTER ONE

A PROPHET'S OWN COUNTRY

I

"In my hell," grumbled Morley Darville, "breakfast—with liver and bacon for those who resist the advances of haddock—will be at eight o'clock; and the other damned souls—damn them!—will *always* be late."

"You should take more exercise," recommended his sister, without looking up from *The Times*.

In the hearing of a stranger, the two remarks must have had little more connection than the incongruously coupled observations, introduced with the rubric *He said to her* and *She said to him*, in the nursery game of "Consequences". During the silence that followed Rose Darville's retort, the stranger would have looked to see strips of paper being folded and exchanged, pencils moistened and chins rubbed as the players set to work

on *The Consequence Was* . . . Were he maliciously disposed, the onlooker could have devised a mordant "consequence" of his own: "*A Young Man In A Bad Temper*," he might begin, "*Meets A Girl With No Temper To Ruffle At Their Parent's Breakfast-Table In Albany Terrace, Regent's Park. He says to her Something That He thinks Clever. She returns the Soft Answer Calculated to Set Wrath Boiling. The consequence is that This Day Begins As Stormily As Every Other. And the world says: 'What A House!'*"

Forestalling the judgement of the world, Morley exclaimed "*What* a house!", as he strode into the hall to smoke a cigarette where neither Henry—who enjoyed playing the elder brother—nor their parents—who carried the "*Don't, darling!*" habit of childhood into the adolescence, maturity and incipient decline of their offspring—could accuse him of polluting the atmosphere of their repast.

"*What* a house!", he repeated with the rising fury of a tired dyspeptic, as the postman's rat-tat roused him, like the tap of a conductor's baton, for the second movement in his morning dirge. "In my hell," he elaborated to the oak-framed highland cattle of Rosa Bonheur in the hall, "every one will entertain so deep a suspicion of his neighbour that the whiskey and cigarettes will be locked away nightly and a grown man of nine-and-twenty will not be allowed to receive his own letters until the head of the house has appeared with his key. *Why*, after all this time . . ."

The still unproven offence which had originally inspired Mr. Darville to protect his letter-box

with a lock was now twenty years old; the dubious offender had left, married and died; Mr. Darville's important letters were sent to him at the office of Bradbourne, Oates and Darville, solicitors, of Coleman Street. Notwithstanding, the daily ritual continued without change.

The plump and placid Rose smiled compassionately as she heard her brother muttering to himself.

"The artistic temperament," she sighed, "*plus* a neglected liver."

It was not worth an argument at this hour of the morning, but the discomforts of Morley's much-discussed hell were largely of his own making. Their parents were too old now to learn new ways; and, as they were punctual in their unpunctuality, he should time his appearance for a quarter past eight. Morley, however, must always have first bath (and, for some reason known to himself alone, shave in the bathroom, thereby keeping Rose out of it for ten precious minutes); he was always down while the hard-pressed parlour-maid was laying breakfast; and there was always a scramble for the one copy of *The Times*.

"Oh, yes! 'What a house!' I daresay! But who makes it so uncomfortable for everybody?," she enquired of the empty room.

2

As the postman's knock became more remote, Rose listened for a fresh outbreak in the hall.

"I may soothe him if I let him have this," she reflected, "though we mustn't give in to his bad temper. You have to fight for your own hand in this place . . ."

Folding *The Times*, she stood up as the door was flung open; but Morley had passed beyond reach of cajolery.

"I should have thought a letter to a man from his editor might be considered important enough *not* to be left in a wire cage till it suits my strange father's convenience to release it," he opened with ominous calm.

"As long as we live here . . .," Rose began.

Morley raised the lid of the tea-pot with the bitterly triumphant air of one who for years had maintained consistently that in his hell the tea would always be stewed.

"You talk as though I had the faintest chance of living anywhere else!," he snorted.

"Well, my dear boy, if you'd stuck to the Bar, father would have sent you all the briefs you were fit to handle. And, if you'd gone into his office, you'd be earning as much as Henry." She seemed to feel that it was perhaps unprofitable to remake a past of which the errors were demonstrated with punctual sorrow by their father whenever it occurred to him that he had brought up his children on wrong lines. "As a matter of fact, we could *all* launch out on our own if we liked. I'm being paid a pound a week more than your Mr. Tidman gives your Miss Welwyn. If she can run to a flat, I can. So could you, Morley. You must make enough by reviewing, even if your novels don't pay. And there's no reason

you shouldn't write a successful one," she hastened to add, "when you've found out what the public wants. After all, you've not been very long at it . . ."

Morley accepted *The Times* as though he had just seen it. When Rose or Henry or their parents had themselves published three novels, their opinion—he felt—would be better worth hearing; but, without waiting for that day, they might advantageously get rid of the idea that he cared a brass farthing what the public chose to make a "success". Until he had educated his public, Morley was content with the praise of papers like the *Literary Review* and the *Whitefriars Gazette*; of men like Rashleigh Tidman and John Stone Firebrace. Incredible as it might seem, he did not put his sales first or second or even third.

"I don't quite know why you call him *my* Mr. Tidman," he murmured, prospecting for a quarrel.

"Well, he's your editor, isn't he?," Rose returned promptly. "I'm always having him thrust down my throat. Old 'Uncle' this and old 'Uncle' that, the parties he gives, the things he says, the wonderful free-and-easy way they all live in that wonderful set . . ."

"I see. And why is Dora *my* Miss Welwyn?"

Love of peace contended with love of truth in Rose's mind as she faced her brother's challenge.

"I should imagine she's more sinned against than sinning," she answered at last. "With that father and mother . . ."

"I didn't ask your opinion of them. I don't suppose you're capable of appreciating a word that either of them has written; and their private lives are hardly your affair."

"If they'd only keep them private! *She* goes about everywhere with her little poet, he with his little dancer. However . . . If I'd known Miss Welwyn and you were 'Dora' and 'Morley' to each other . . ."

It was unnecessary for Rose to finish her sentence.

"You don't like her?," Morley enquired, his eyes fixed on the advertisement of a proved cure for alcoholism.

"When a girl is called a 'sport' and allows herself to be mauled by old men . . . No, I thought she was a little horror the one time I saw her."

Morley returned to his paper with disdainful calm and read assiduously until a murmur of voices penetrated from the hall. "'Morning, mummie." "Henry darling!" "Well, Henry, my boy?" "'Morning, father." In the silence that followed, keys jingled and a cascade of letters pattered down on the tiled floor.

Morley faced the door, with *The Times* tentatively extended, before his father could say: "*Who's taken the paper?*" Tentatively extended, too, was his head. If he could kiss his mother first, it would be a short affair; and he could then ask for tea before she said: "*Tea, Morley dear?*," as though he ever took anything but tea, as though there was ever anything but tea to take! There was no means of keeping his father from saying: "*We're late, I'm afraid, this morning.*"

The door opened; and one more day in the common, public life of the Darvilles began. Seething with rage against his outspoken sister, Morley surveyed the familiar scene with a close-lipped smile of hatred reinforced by hunger. If a thunderbolt from a justly nauseated heaven wiped out the house and all its occupants, would anybody miss them? There must be hundreds of Roses and Henrys between Marylebone Road and Primrose Hill; their parents, surely, would not notice if they changed places for a few days with their neighbours. Perhaps the parents themselves changed places and the wisest of sons did not know his own father!

This alluring hypothesis, which promised to explain why Morley differed so violently from the rest of the family in talents and temperament, broke down when he looked at the faces of his sister and brother. Alas, they carried birth-certificates in their undistinguished brown eyes and nondescript hair; the broad white brows and full lips came from their mother, the bucolic apple-cheeks from their father. It was a toss-up whether they shrank, like him, or expanded, like her; and Morley was convinced that no human being would ever remember them again after a hundred meetings.

"*What* a family!"

3

It was a pity, Morley considered, that they took so little trouble!

In dread of inheriting his mother's amplitude, he himself submitted to rigorous dieting; and, if he starved his nerves at the same time as his flesh, at least his face looked intelligently alert. In spite of ridicule, too, he had developed a style of his own—why on earth not?—with a black cloak, for wear out of doors, fastened at the neck with a silver chain, a broad-brimmed hat and trousers strapped under the instep. His relations, of course, had criticized each item, as from time to time they criticized his tortoise-shell spectacles and experimental side-whiskers, enquiring uneasily why he felt obliged to be different from other people. They would not understand that he *was* different, still less that he deserved rather different handling. A prophet was not without honour, save in his own country.

"The tea's rather strong," Mrs. Darville was warning him, as though he were still a child. "Put plenty of milk into it, darling."

"We were late, I'm afraid, this morning . . .," her husband announced.

Morley gulped a mouthful of strong, sweet Indian tea and took his place in the queue at the sideboard. What a life!

At the same season every year, in the first unsettling warmth of spring, he experienced the same mad hatred for all his surroundings. In the houses on either side, in the terraces north, south and west of them, similar fathers were now peering at similar electro-plated chafing-dishes; similar white-haired mothers were absent-mindedly dropping lumps of sugar into their tea; and similar sons and daughters were doing similar division-

sums with their eyes on similar triangles of liver and curls of bacon. The English professional class at first feeding-time . . . Their adoring mother—Morley knew to his cost—imagined that they were not only different from other people, but distinguishable from one another. Rose, who tried to induce order in the life of an untidy politician from ten till two, was "the domestic one"; she was also "the athletic one", when she went off to her lawn-tennis club, and "the social one", when she collected a party for a subscription dance. Henry was variously "a plodder", "his father's right-hand" and "the serious one".

"Charges that no one would dream of bringing against me," Morley reflected.

And yet it was for him that Mrs. Darville in fact reserved her most embarrassing admiration and cloying tenderness. The Eton scholar (she conveniently forgot that he had failed to get even an exhibition at Cambridge), the son who had been at "the university" (she did not enlarge on his pass degree), the barrister (she omitted to mention that he had never practised) and now the writer! As every one knew, Morley was dramatic critic of the *Literary Review*, the trenchant signatory of a weekly article entitled *Books and Their Writers* and himself the author of three novels which were so clever that Mrs. Darville did not pretend to understand them. Why add that in commercial, uncultured England nobody read his books or listened to his criticism? Why confess that already the friends who had praised *Anchorage* and *Uncle Simon* and *The Clown's Tragedy* were beginning to say that his inspiration needed strengthening and

renewing? As though any one could hope to find inspiration in a house where the very mind became tarnished! If, like Dora Welwyn, he had boldly broken away . . .

"Darling, you're letting your bacon get *so* cold," said Mrs. Darville in tender reproach.

Morley came out of his dreams and looked round the table. The others had been engrossed in their letters, but were now primed for family conversation.

"Oh, what d'you think? Jane Halley's engaged!"

"There's a bill here from the gas-stove people for eighteen two six. Is that all right? It seems a lot of money."

"Poor Aunt Maud is very bad again. Her doctor wants her to try Droitwich."

Did they talk like that, Morley wondered, at Bernard Shaw's table, munching with one eye on the clock and already overshadowed by thoughts of the day's work? Was John Galsworthy expected to cluck sympathetically over an aunt's rheumatism?

Morley began to open his letters, keeping till last the one from his editor. If he mentioned that he was going to a first night, Rose always wanted to know whether he had a ticket for her.

"If you and your father are walking to the city, Henry, I'll come as far as Shoolbred's with you," said Mrs. Darville, as a reminder that it was now time for the daily discussion of plans.

"The Dennisons have asked me to go back for supper after tennis, mummie," Rose contributed. "Will that be all right?"

Morley became conscious that his mother was looking at him.

"I shall be out for lunch," he announced. "They're trying out Presterwyck's *Robber Baron* at the New Art Theatre this afternoon. I shall be in for dinner, but I'm going on afterwards to one of the Tidmans' parties."

"Then we shan't get our bridge," sighed Mrs. Darville. "Unless I ask Dr. Robertson or Mrs. Carew to come in. You don't feel that a quiet evening at home would be good for you?"

Morley shook his head, murmuring that he was pledged. These "quiet evenings" were too exciting for highly strung nerves! The conversation at dinner was always based on the day's murders, political speeches and aristocratic engagements. The bridge, as Mrs. Darville explained with a nightly new air of originality, was a relaxation after a hard day; and she played for the sake of the game, not liking to take other people's money nor to lose her own.

"Will you be back in good time, Morley, or do you want a latch-key?," asked his father.

"I should think it would be a fairly late show."

Morley was careful to avoid his sister's eye; but he felt that their debate over the locked letter-box was being continued into a silent duologue. "*As a latch-key has* never *been refused you, it*'s surely *no hardship to ask for one?*" "*But isn't it a* little *ridiculous that a man of nine-and-twenty should have to make formal application three and four times a week? Thank goodness he doesn't wait to make out a receipt when I give the damned thing back . . .*"

Ridiculous? Thirty years earlier, in a different city and century, a paternal grandfather or great-uncle had lost a latch-key; and the front-door lock had had to be altered. The lesson had sunk in . . .

It was strange, Morley reflected, how his parents lived in the past! This house might have been dug from the embrace of a lava-stream that had buried it a dozen years before he himself was born. That one bathroom with its ill-painted bath and faint smell of stale carbolic, that economical linoleum and panel-effect lincrusta, those inadequate maids and casual meals, that contempt for comfort and distrust of style! Life was carried on, by these strange ancestor-worshippers, in obedience to some piece of hoary silliness laid down by "my dear father", whose sense might be judged by his characteristic decree that, though there was no "actual *harm*" in playing cards on Sunday, it was a pity—when they had all the rest of the week—to hurt people's feelings by doing so. And now Rose clearly intended to carry on the nonsense into another generation with such precepts as that there was surely enough unhappiness in the world, "as mother and father always say," without dragging it into books and plays . . .

"My darling boy looks pensive. Or is he only tired? No good trying to burn the candle at both ends!" Mrs. Darville had paused on her way to the door and laid a hand on her younger son's shoulder. There was a melting coo in her voice; and Morley felt a cad in sneering at her. "Were you very late last night?"

"Not particularly, but I've been working rather

hard lately," he answered. "I think I shall go down to Burnham at Whitsun."

If only he could pluck up courage to abandon his dramatic criticism, he would go there and stay there! This tranquil farm-house in Buckinghamshire, where—for a trifling rent—he kept a bedroom, a hip-bath and a box of old clothes, had for three years been his refuge when a book had to be finished; and, now that the spring was once again mysteriously infecting his blood, he felt that he must escape or suffocate. At this moment the mobilization of the self-styled "bread-winners" or "world's-workers" was beginning! On the first stroke of nine each day they pushed back their chairs and pulled out their cigarette-cases; the women brushed hats for the men; and the men waited, watch in hand, while the women paid hurried visits to the larder and kitchen.

"It never occurs to them," Morley sighed, "that a partner in Bradbourne, Oates and Darville could afford a man to brush clothes or a woman to order meals."

Of course not! Mr. Darville's "dear father" had laid down that no men-servants were to be trusted not to steal the cigars and water the whiskey . . .

4

RUSTLING his letters importantly, Morley went upstairs to the converted nursery which he had wrung from his parents without at all convincing them that there was any reason why he should

not "do his writing" in the drawing-room instead of demanding additional fire and light for himself. When the bread-winners set out and again when they returned for dinner, he was always made to feel that he was not an authentic "world's-worker". The others would only be too grateful if some one gave *them* a guinea every time they read a novel or went to a show!

"I suppose, for once in a way, Rose is right," Morley admitted grudgingly. "I *am* making enough to set up on my own. It would mean cutting things very fine."

He paused on the threshold of his room to debate for the hundredth time whether he would gain or lose by going away. This crowded garret was too small for his growing library and it was inconveniently far from the telephone, but at least he enjoyed undisturbed and undisputed possession of it. Little by little he had banished the worn Victorian mahogany to the neighbouring box-room and had substituted Queen Anne walnut. The family thought it extravagant to buy new furniture when the old was still serviceable; but presumably, if one had an "artistic temperament", one was never satisfied with things that were good enough for other people. If the worst came to the worst (whatever that might mean), there always seemed to be a good market—said his father—for Queen Anne walnut.

"The idea of beauty for its own sake . . ."

Though he would have to forgo the luxury of collecting, he would escape a deal of petty irritation by going away and he might have a chance of being taken on his merits for the first

time since he came down from Cambridge. There he was supposed to be rather good-looking. At the end of every May Week there had been an exchange of photographs, an incipient correspondence. Even now the candid Miss Dora Welwyn told him that he had "charm" when he forgot to think about himself . . .

Morley shut himself in and opened the letter from his editor.

"Uncle has been letting himself go," he murmured, as a wad of closely-typed pages fell out. Then he frowned as his eye was caught by his own name at the foot of a proof-slip. "I hope to God he hasn't been cutting about my *Books and Writers*."

The letter opened pleasantly enough:

"*I enclose the proof of your current article and like what you say about young Williamson and Miss Barnard. Both of them ought to go far; and they deserve all the encouragement that can be given them. I am sending you the new Arnold Bennett and some short stories by E. M. Delafield. Your copy, as usual, by Wednesday morning at latest, please.*

"*And now, my dear Morley, I have a crow to pluck with you! I have turned over your articles for the last few months and I am compelled to ask what principle or prejudice you have been going on. I do not object to a consistently slashing style: it may have a commercial value if people read it to see who's the latest victim of your active tomahawk, though it has no value—critical or commercial—when people come to say that you tomahawk the good and the bad indiscriminately . . .*"

Morley seized a blue pencil and underlined the opening words of the letter.

"Poor old Uncle! Drunk again, I suppose," he grunted. "First he thanks me for patting young What's-His-Name on the back, then he talks about 'tomahawking indiscriminately'. However . . ."

"*In the last year,*" the letter went on, "*you have glanced at several hundred novels in* Books and Their Writers; *and in looking through the files I have become conscious of a distinct bias which can do you no good as a critic or as a man. In brief, you are not even decently civil to men who have made a reputation for themselves; you are curtly contemptuous of almost any book that treats of the prosperous classes; and you are almost too gentle with any that concerns itself with the proletariat.*"

"I thought the cult of the bold bad baronet went out with *Ruddigore*," Morley exclaimed.

"*I submit,*" Mr. Tidman continued, "*that the critic's first business is to see what a writer has attempted and to say how far he has succeeded. He must not condemn Henry James for not writing like George Gissing, about Gissing's world. Now, you have had Galsworthy, Wells and Allerdyce through your hands in the last year—all depicting a leisured-class life—not to mention a score of other authors whose names are known and honoured wherever English is read. The best you can find to say of one and all is:* 'For those people who like this sort of thing, this is the sort of thing those people like.'

"*Well, my dear Morley, I should be wanting in frankness if I did not warn you of the explanation which other people put forward to account for this*

bias. It is beginning to be said that you despise a section of society because you don't happen to belong to it and that you would be more tolerant of commercial success if your own books had done better. Even your friends are protesting a little impatiently that a book is not necessarily bad because the public likes it. Now, nobody can afford to get the reputation of savaging a man because he's successful . . . "

"And nobody . . . " Morley began in cold fury. "However, I'll see what *else* he has to say!"

"*I must tell you that there's more in this charge than you'd perhaps care to admit. Within the last year you reviewed in the same issue a novel by an entirely unknown author and one by an author whose name is a household word. You praised the first and damned the second. I had just reviewed the second, very favourably, for another paper; and, after reading your praise of the first, I had a look at it. My dear Morley, it seems that hate blinds as thoroughly as love! You had failed to see, what I saw at a glance, that the two books were by the same man. Style, philosophy, subject-matter, even little idiosyncrasies of spelling which he ought to have been clever enough to leave out. I tackled him; and he admitted he had done it to test the selling value of his name. Money was no particular object to him, but he wanted to see how much he was advertised and what space he was given in the review-columns when he wrote under a* nom-de-guerre. *I'm afraid you plumped into the trap with all four feet! We had a rare laugh; but, when I'd thought it over, I decided that this was no laughing-matter for you. It seemed to me your good-faith was involved. Hence this warning.*"

5

WHEN he came to the end of the letter, Morley threw away his cigarette and walked once or twice up and down his room. This was really rather much to bear! One expected better things of old Uncle, but he was like all the rest. Obviously, one could not go on!

Morley sat down to his table and, with a shaking hand, drafted his resignation from the staff of the *Literary Review*. "*As my good-faith has been called in question* . . .," he began, then paused to think how he could assail the good-faith of his editor. This was not the first time that he had been pulled up for trying to speak his mind honestly: whenever a publisher threatened to withdraw his advertisements or an author took the greedy old time-server out to luncheon, a proof-slip would be sent back, as now, with Tidman's red-ink comment: "*You're pitching it too strong.*" And this was keeping faith with readers who still regarded the *Literary Review* as the only honest paper in England!

"No good starting a slanging-match," Morley decided. "If I'm going to leave . . ."

He walked to the door and turned involuntarily to survey his crowded book-cases and littered table. Odd to think that, a bare ten minutes ago, he had been debating the question of cutting adrift from here and wondering whether this day's first spring softness was responsible for his discontent! Odd that he should have nearly quarrelled with Rose

over Dora Welwyn when he was unlikely to see her again! Oddest of all that he should find the old life unendurable at the very moment when he must be thankful for anything that enabled him to continue living it! This was the biggest crisis he had been required to face. Was it the end of his literary career? Would Uncle climb down or must he break it to the family at dinner that night that he had made another false start?

And how would the news be received? His mother would say that he had gone to the stake for his conscience; his father would exclaim querulously that "the boy" apparently could not stick to any single thing for five minutes on end. "*Now, this is your last chance! If you go back to the Bar and behave yourself* properly . . ." Or "*I've decided that you had better disbar yourself and come into my office.* Discipline *is what you seem to need* . . ." In Fleet Street they would murmur that he had been asked to resign. Any man who walked into so yawning a trap was a danger to his paper; and the critic of style who could not detect the same manner under two different names was useless to any paper. It would be difficult, after this, to get another job.

"All the same, it's no good *waiting* to be fired . . ."

Morley tore up his draft and looked again at Tidman's letter. Between the level lines of type he seemed to see a grin. Old Uncle must be bursting with malice over this! In some way, whatever else happened, his gossiping mouth must be stopped.

"I'll tell him just what I think of him," Morley promised himself. "And if ever I find out who the joker was who played that trick . . ."

It was not pleasant to think that the family might, after all, be right in their estimate of him.

CHAPTER TWO

AN AUDIENCE OF ONE

I

MORLEY went from Regent's Park to Fleet Street on foot. He needed exercise, to disperse his ill-temper, and time, to think how much it would be prudent to say.

"If Uncle means this as a warning, I must get in first blow," he decided. "I can't go on working for him unless I can write what I please without having mean motives chucked at my head. Ordinary self-respect . . . It's a risk, of course, to resign, but 'safety first' has never been my favourite motto . . ."

The empty hall reminded him of that morning's mobilization of the bread-winners. They were a flabby lot! His father, small and harassed, ruling by weakness: had he ever been young or adventurous? Was there a hidden chapter of revelry and recklessness, or had he lisped from his cradle that the Darvilles were old-fashioned, homely folk of the middle class and that the world must take them as it found them? And Henry, in the next generation? Did he never regret that he had so placidly accepted the school and office-chair ordained by his father?

As he left the house, Morley slammed the door as though he hoped to make his brother—now bent over his wills and settlements in Coleman Street—ask at least what the distant noise betokened. These people wanted waking up! If the younger generation made common cause . . . Alas, to cautious Henry, the impending scene with old Uncle would be simply "quarrelling with your bread and butter"! No sympathy in *that* quarter! Nor from Rose, though she had zest and the possibilities of success. Now that she was letting her hair grow again after shingling, she was a girl of whom no brother need be ashamed, with brown eyes, like a friendly dog's, and comfortable curves to distinguish her from the knife-board girls of the day. She was popular in her dancing, lawn-tennis-playing set and always ready for such mild adventures as came her way; but, like the rest of them, she was terrified of any departure from the average and familiar. That was the canker in the Darville brain, their averageness.

"Confront Rose with a girl like Dora Welwyn, who has a different outlook," Morley fretted, "and she at once dismisses her as 'weird' and probably 'immoral'. Dora *may* be, by Darville standards, but do these worthy souls ever examine their precious standards?"

Striding down Albany Street, Morley caught sight of his reflection in a shop-window; and the glimpse of streaming black cloak and tasselled cane brought a welcome feeling of reassurance. Rose might ask, with sisterly bluntness, why he felt obliged to make a "sight" of himself by growing side-whiskers which he could never keep the same

length on both cheeks, but the artifices which she thought affectations set him apart from the average people who led average lives and worshipped an average god.

"It's the average values of average men and women that make me *despair* of art in this country!," Morley fumed. "That's at the bottom of this row with Uncle. He doesn't want criticism, he wants a book-list for the libraries. And, as the novel-reading public in England has much the same taste as the film public in America, I'm to shout with the crowd!"

Crossing Marylebone Road, he slackened his pace through the broad silence of Portland Place and began to think how he should frame his protest to old "Uncle" Tidman.

Though he might make a defence if he knew which books he was supposed to have confused, it seemed better to let old Uncle have his laugh (provided he kept the "joke" to himself) without even suggesting that, when a man had a dozen novels to review in a short time, he could not bother about "idiosyncrasies of spelling". The sooner, indeed, that they got from the particular to the general, the sooner he could convert his defence into an attack. There seemed to be two charges against his good faith as a critic: he "tomahawked" the successful writer because his own books were unsuccessful and he reserved his most ferocious attentions for the "society novelist" on the ground that

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a "society novel" provided the shortest road to commercial success. Was that it?

Well, there was little profit, Morley decided, in assuring old Uncle that he personally neither hoped nor wished to be (what was vulgarly called) a "successful novelist"; nor could he ever persuade him that in castigating the "established" authors he was lashing at something more than a single slovenly book or a single worked-out theme. If any one was pilloried, it was the British public.

"I must meet him on his own ground," Morley told himself. "The files! '*I've turned over your articles for the last few months* . . .' If he'd turn them over for the last few years, he might get a glimmering of what I've been aiming at! Not a single writer of the faintest individuality, not a single book of the slightest promise have I overlooked! David Garnett, Virginia Woolf, R. H. Mottram. I acclaimed them all, even if I didn't discover them. They may not make the income of an Edgar Wallace, but they can hardly be called failures. Which disposes of *that*. As for this nonsense about the 'upper ten' and the 'submerged tenth' . . . I'm supposed to rank Sheila Kaye-Smith's peasants above Hugh Walpole's Dukes of Romney and Duchesses of Wrexe? If Uncle would really examine the files, he'd find that I'd gone for both those popular novelists quite impartially. And not—curiously enough!—because they're 'successful,' but because in my humble opinion they're overwriting themselves. This dreadful business of bringing out a new book every six or twelve months! I imagine they want to exploit their popularity while it lasts. Your fashionable novelist has to go about in a huge car

and winter abroad . . . I don't know whether Uncle *means* me to take him seriously about this 'upper ten' nonsense. If he *does* . . ."

Morley stood, lost in thought, at the corner of Oxford Circus, watching the tide of traffic pouring down Regent Street. Max Beerbohm, he recalled, had written a delicious fantasy of Hay Hill in the days when it was still plausible for that enchanted country to be wasted by a "dreadful dragon"; it was disheartening to think that, though the dragon was dead, the country was still enchanted. Year after year on this square mile of costly shops and costlier houses there debouched from Piccadilly and Oxford Street, Park Lane and Hanover Square a horde of new writers all eager to taste the magic of Mayfair. Greeks and Jews from the east, Americans from the west, Scots from the north and even a few English from the midlands, they hurried to this snobs' fairyland, drank of the spring, wrote their books or score of books and died or departed, making way for a new generation and leaving their agents to arrange for their film-rights.

"The society novelists! Making their five or ten thousand a year by pandering to shop-girls! Dazzling the submerged tenth with pictures of an upper ten that they've not even seen! When I think of the brainless, conceited asses who cumbered the earth at Eton . . ."

The tide of traffic was checked and Morley continued on his way down Regent Street. How, even ten years later, he loathed the memory of his time at school! How it rankled still to see the faint contempt on a fellow Etonian's face when he was obliged to say that he had been in College! He

should, of course, have been proud to be a scholar, on a foundation that had existed for centuries before the Old Etonian tie became a badge of social adequacy; instead, he was made to feel like a poor relation, a charity-boy. And, irony of ironies!, it was thought by his father that these five years of supercilious neglect from well-connected half-wits had given him "grand ideas." Mr. Darville was always wondering whether they had not made a great mistake in letting poor Morley take that scholarship . . .

"All of which doesn't help me with old Uncle," he told himself, wrenching his mind back to the impending interview. "The truth is, he has been got at by some one. And I'd give a good deal to know who it is."

3

THROUGH Leicester Square and along the Strand to the very door of the *Literary Review*, Morley shuffled and discarded the names of men who might have been trying to corrupt his editor. In the early morning and late afternoon old Uncle was an austere and penetrating critic; between whiles, the more when he was mellowed by luncheon at the Savoy, he would cut about a review already passed for printing until it had lost not only its asperity but its point. And, when a pretty, well-dressed woman flattered him, he seldom failed to find at least "promise" in her work. Somewhere within the last few days a novelist "whose name was a household word" might have entered in his petty-

cash book: "*To squaring Tidman*, 1 *luncheon*, 2 *cigars*, 3 *old brandies*."

"I suppose Dora will know. It beats me . . .," Morley had to confess.

Both Wells and Galsworthy had at one time or another published books, subsequently avowed, either anonymously or under a *nom-de-guerre*, but it was below their dignity to play practical jokes at the expense of reviewers who, when all was said and done, had the last word in any press vendetta. Besides, a joke of this kind would be an expensive luxury: the unknown author might, with luck, scrape together a hundred or two where the known best-seller, without difficulty of any kind, would rake in his thousands. No doubt—the public taste being what it was—these fellows could afford to fling their money about, but they were not usually anxious to accept less than their maximum price.

"And, before I'm through with him, this particular fellow will be asking what I'll take to let him off," Morley promised himself, as he pushed through the public office to a glazed door marked *PRIVATE*.

The editor's dingy room was empty; and he occupied himself by looking at the books sent in for review. Was any one deceived by the publisher's confident assertion that Mr. So-and-So had never written a more brilliant or tender or daring book than this one? Presumably the publicity-manager kept these "blurbs" standing in type and earned his salary by deciding, after hours of cogitation, whether Miss Languish's last touching story of faith justified and love triumphant should be

described as "fresh" or "fragrant". The commercialization of literature . . .

The door opened slowly to admit first a tea-tray, then a pair of arms and finally the body to which they belonged.

"Hullo, Dora!", Morley grunted.

"Hullo!" the girl answered. "We haven't had a great lot in since you were last here. I've put the new Brett Young aside for you. And there's a book, by some one whose name I've forgotten, which is sure to be banned. Otherwise the publishers wouldn't charge a guinea for it. If you buy up all the copies you can get, you'll be able to sell them at a nice profit."

"A flutter in the pornography market? Well, I may come to that before I've done. What's happened to Uncle? I've come here to have things out with him."

The girl poured herself a cup of tea and carried it to her employer's table. Lighting a cigarette from a crushed yellow packet, she sat down in his chair, with her legs dangling over the arm.

"He telephoned that he'd be late. What has he been saying to ruffle you?"

Morley delayed to answer until he had made sure of Dora Welwyn's mood. In an unsympathetic world, she seemed at times the only person who ever backed him in his fight with the false values of the age. An audience of one, but an audience . . . At other times, when he wanted her to talk sensibly and she only wanted him to make love to her, she was frankly impossible.

"You remember that letter you typed for Uncle

yesterday? What did you think of it?," he asked, without committing himself.

"Well, as Uncle said, you plumped in with all four feet, didn't you?" Dora's wide mouth opened in an infuriating grin. "I couldn't help laughing . . ."

"Did Uncle say who his joker friend was?," Morley enquired indifferently.

"No, he was sworn to secrecy. I hoped you would remember. It was evidently one of the big guns . . ."

Morley shook his head with faint impatience:

"Though Uncle may not believe it, I'm more concerned with the book than with the reputation of the man who wrote it."

As he spoke, his eye was caught by his own name on a label attached to a bulky package. Loosening the string, he found inside a pile of six novels. With a reckless sense that he was issuing an ultimatum, he carried the books to the rack of undistributed review copies and tossed the paper into the fire-place. Dora, he knew, was watching him; and, when he looked up, he was not displeased to observe that she seemed impressed.

"I shouldn't take it too seriously, if I were you," she counselled.

"If one doesn't take things like 'good faith' seriously . . . Uncle can take back what he's said or he can find somebody else for my job."

Morley strode to the window and stared down, through dust-coated wire-blinds, at the glass roof of a ground-floor office. The "street of adventure", as some one called this part of London: it was a grubby, fly-blown place! Worn linoleum and a

threadbare Brussels carpet, a scratched table and three damaged chairs, a filing cabinet and an enclosed washing-basin, a defective gas-fire and a hat-and-umbrella stand: these were the appurtenances of the throne-room to which he might have succeeded if all his one-time dreams had come true. Now . . . Was it worth it? He felt sick of everything and everybody! Dora, of whom he expected some sympathy, would only say that she "could not help laughing"!

He turned at the touch of a hand on his arm and found himself being offered a cigarette.

"I hope you *won't* go, Morley. I should miss you."

4

He accepted the cigarette and lighted it from the glowing end of Dora's. A pity that she *would* smoke American tobacco! Her hands, not overclean at the best of times, were blotched yellow; and a faintly acrid smell clung to her clothes in spite of the scent in which she drenched herself.

"There'll be no difficulty in finding some one to take my place," he growled.

"Are you referring to Uncle or to me?"

"Uncle, of course *You . . . ?* There's never been a place for me to fill or leave empty!"

"Oh? I thought we were rather good friends. You know I've *honestly* believed in you when other people were only sorry for you or trying to spare your feelings."

Morley shifted uneasily from one foot to another.

The little cat was quick with her claws when she failed to get an expected caress! He would like to know who was being "sorry for" him. Old Uncle?

"I know . . .," he muttered.

Of all times and places this was the least appropriate to a scene of tenderness; and, though Dora was always ready enough for mild love-making, she accepted it rather too much as her due. Perhaps, now that she was in danger of losing him, she wished she had made more effort. Perhaps, again, she was coming to the end of one affair and would like to begin another. She was an amorous little creature . . .

"*I* shall miss *you*," he continued. "After all this time . . ."

It must be six years, Morley calculated, since their first meeting; at a studio-party where Dora had talked to him for three hours of sexual repressions and abnormalities. She was but eighteen then; and, after his first embarrassment, he had been carried away by her tirade against false shame and intellectual dishonesty. His frequent, though expurgated, quotations from her discourse were what caused his sister to charge him with thrusting "his Miss Welwyn" down their throats at home.

"This is a pretty foul place at the best of times," Dora grumbled. "And when I'm at home . . ."

She left him to decide for himself whether "home" meant the rooms where she lived by herself in Fulham, or the house which her fascinating father shared with a Russian dancer in Hampstead, or the flat where her mother inspired, comforted,

criticized and quarrelled with a dynasty of unrecognized poets. Morley never knew whether Dora was proud or ashamed of her parents. Perhaps she did not herself know; perhaps she was ashamed and proud by turns, as by turns she relished the independence and the pathos of her position. She would be somewhat easier to understand, he felt, if she stuck consistently to one style; but the siren in artificial silk and the bohemian who signed an attendance-book daily at half-past nine were mutually destructive poses.

"And think how sick of things I get *all* the time!," Morley burst out suddenly, his grievances mounting to his head in a rush. "At home, where I'm the failure of the family, whatever my mother likes to think. Here, where I'm not only a failure, but a jealous failure, sneering at people because their books sell and mine don't . . ."

"Yours would sell like hot cakes if you took the trouble," Dora interrupted contemptuously. "Write about inarticulate husbands and misunderstood wives all living in Mayfair on upwards of ten thousand a year. Write about wayward daughters of comic peers, write about success, money, castles, yachts, moors! You'll get all the gush you want. Doesn't it mean more, though, when a man like Uncle tells you that there's real promise in what you're doing?"

Dora threw her head back to shake the hair out of her eyes. The trick, borrowed from an idolized young actress, vaguely irritated Morley, who always wanted to tell her that it did not belong to her repertory. A rather snub nose and a rather wide mouth, with a pair of twinkling hazel eyes,

invested Dora with an air of good-humoured pertness that could never consort with the anguished movements of a tragedy queen.

"One gets tired of this everlasting talk about 'promise'," he grumbled.

Dora threw away her cigarette and stood up as the clock in the outer office began to strike.

"That's another matter," she answered. "If you ask me, I should say: put more red blood into your writing. It's clever, but it's cold. If you got drunk occasionally and crawled upstairs with your foot through your hat and a woman's stocking round your throat . . ."

Morley glanced at some of the phrases which he had underlined in his editor's letter. "*I should be wanting in frankness if I did not warn you* . . ."

"There seems a consensus of opinion that I can't write," he observed acidly. "Whether it's lack of red blood or indifference to the aristocracy . . . I really wonder if I shouldn't go back to the bar and earn a steady hundred a year in the county courts . . ."

He stopped, perforce, as Dora stretched up and laid a finger on his lips.

"You're talking great nonsense," she told him. "Nobody that matters thinks you're a failure. You're not to be sour and you're not to say anything that you'll regret afterwards. You *would* regret it, you know, if you quarrelled with Uncle and never saw me again. When you can't stand things at home, you know you can always come and blow off steam at me . . ."

Withdrawing her hand, she leant forward and brushed his cheeks with her lips. Morley was

startled and faintly annoyed. He did not choose to be petted like an ill-tempered child. However, if Dora kissed him, he was at liberty to kiss her; and, though he was always faintly antagonized by her air of invitation, he felt that it would be a relief to kiss almost any one.

Laying his hands on her shoulders, he drew her to him till their lips met. She exhibited a slightly disconcerting want of surprise and returned his embrace with a warmth that made him feel inexperienced. To an expert, she seemed to suggest, his love-making—like his writing—was "cold" and lacking in "red blood."

"You great baby!," she whispered, wriggling in his arms. "You don't deserve . . ."

A heavy step sounded in the public office; and a deep voice threw greetings to a couple of clerks and a door-keeper. Springing apart, she pointed to the paper and string which Morley had tossed aside. For an instant, as she smoothed her hair and straightened her dress, he squared his shoulders and summoned back the frown with which he had arrived; but, when he found a pile of six novels being thrust at him, his indignation collapsed.

"Brett Young?," he murmured with sudden earnestness. "He's good, but he's becoming long-winded. Robin Allerdyce? The same as all the rest, I suppose. I rather think of having a rubber stamp made for people who write the same book twice a year under different titles. A volume of short stories by some one I've never heard of. An agrarian epic by a Latvian who'll win the Nobel prize before he's done. Compton Mackenzie. Warwick Deeping? . . ."

The door crashed open as though an elephant had leant against it.

"Morning, Miss Welwyn," the deep voice boomed. "Ah, Morley! I was half expecting you."

"I came to tender my resignation," Morley began in the hope of putting his editor on the defensive.

"I was half expecting that," Mr. Tidman answered imperturbably. "And you stayed to tell me you'd thought better of it? Good lad! Were you as much tickled as I was to find you'd been caught napping? The same thing happened to me when I was reading for a firm of publishers in my remote youth . . ."

"I should like to know who the joker was," said Morley.

Though he spoke stiffly, it was impossible to remain angry with the placid mass of gently-quaking flesh before him. Rashleigh Tidman had not been measured since he reached six foot three at school, nor weighed since he turned the scale at eighteen stone. With a drooping moustache and hands like flippers, he looked like a dressed-up sea-lion; and no one had ever caught him out of temper.

"Alas! My lips are sealed," he sighed. "I can only tell you it's the last person in the world you would think of."

"It would make a better story if you could tell it with all the names."

"But you don't imagine I'm going to make a story of it? My dear boy, it never helps a paper to be publicly hoaxed! And it won't help you or the cause you have at heart to be so indiscriminately

savage. Every one connected with the book-trade knows that, if you can't get a good review, the next best thing is a bad one. What authors and publishers dread is to be ignored. If you think a book's worthless, your best course is to leave it alone."

"The *Literary Review* can't consistently ignore the work of men who are supposed to be at the head of their profession."

Tidman smiled and sat down at his table, turning an unlighted cigar round and round in his mouth. The smile, Morley felt, might mean that the policy of a paper was the concern of its editor; or it might mean that he was amused by his young colleague's use of the word "consistently."

"I'd sooner, for your sake, that you ignored them than slated them. Needless to say, *I* don't charge you with jealousy. I admire your courage. And I envy you your freedom, Morley. You've a rich father to keep you from starving while you preserve ideals that have long been denied to me. You can resign if you feel your integrity of soul is being threatened, without thinking of a wife and children. Now I must turn you out! You're doing that thing at the New Art this afternoon? Good lad! You can take Miss Welwyn if she'd care to go. And I shall see you at my place to-night? Nils Hansen is coming and I shall try to make him play."

5

Morley made his way through the public office and into the street with mixed feelings. The great

protest was undelivered; there had been no apology; and he still had no idea who was responsible for the trap into which he had so gratuitously fallen. All this notwithstanding, he was agreeably excited. When he met Dora at the *matinée*, he would suggest calling for her on his way to the Tidmans' party. When they left, he would see her home. Perhaps she would invite him to come in for a drink. He was no longer sick of everybody and everything. . . .

Diving into a tea-shop, he untied his parcel and opened the first book at random.

"*His grace is abroad, m'lady . . .*"

"Allerdyce, for a bob," he told himself. In Robin Allerdyce's world everybody had a title; no one had less than one car. His people toiled not, except to escape the boredom which they themselves generated; neither did they spin anything but the improbable epigrams which the author put in their mouths. Improbable, because Allerdyce in all likelihood had never met a duke. Of him one might ask, as old Isaac D'Israeli asked of his son in identical circumstances: what did he know about them? "And this sort of thing sells! It always has, since the first of princes married the first of goose-girls. My God!"

Morley ordered himself some food and read until it was time to set out for the New Art Theatre. He found Dora Welwyn by the box-office, talking in whispers to the author, and stationed himself in sight of them both, tapping the tiled floor with his cane, until she broke off and joined him. For this afternoon at least she owed herself to him! No doubt it flattered her vanity to be seen talking

to Presterwyck. Unless his memory were at fault, Morley fancied that Dora's name had at one time been rather freely coupled with this distinguished playwright's; but he had no intention of letting her drive them in double harness.

"No point in hanging about up here, is there?," he asked.

"Not unless there's any one you want to speak to," Dora answered.

"You bet not! If I talk to the author, people think I'm being nobbled. If I speak to another critic, they think we're all conspiring to say the same thing . . ."

"You really imagine any one bothers?," she enquired a little scornfully. "I don't suppose twenty people in this theatre ever look at the *Literary Review;* critics apart, I don't suppose five of them know you by sight."

One good snub seemed to deserve another.

"If you're shirty because I dragged you away from Presterwyck," said Morley, "you're free to go back to him. There's plenty of time before the curtain goes up."

The girl laughed and tickled his ankle with the point of her toe.

"Are you jealous?," she asked.

"Not a bit!"

"Oh? I hoped you might be. That would shew you weren't completely indifferent to me."

"I should have thought you knew that without trying to make me jealous. Surely that kind of game is out of date now."

"Is it? How *would* you shew you were fond of a person?"

Morley laughed in spite of himself.

"The auditorium of a theatre, with the lights up, is hardly the place for a demonstration. And until I know I'm wanted . . . You've never had time to waste on me . . ."

"Well, I'm giving you a lot of time *and* attention to-day," Dora whispered. "If you like to call for me this evening . . ."

Morley was on the point of saying: "*I was going to suggest that*," when the curtain went up. Instead, he gave her a programme and took her hand in his own.

CHAPTER THREE

A PALACE OF TRUTH

I

On his way home to dinner, Morley discovered that he was several hours ahead of the time-table which he had sketched out at luncheon. In the first place, Dora had suggested—without prompting—that he should call for her at the Fulham flat to which he had never yet been admitted; in the second, she had made plain—at the theatre and afterwards in the empty office—that he need no longer—as she expressed it—"go about with a face like a yard-measure, saying that nobody loved him." Only his stupidity (or, if he preferred it, modesty) had kept him, "blessed innocent," from seeing, years ago, that she was very fond of him; but she could not tell him so and would not have told him now, if he had not taken a high tragic line and threatened to turn his back on Fleet Street for ever.

Thus Dora, seated on his knee in old Uncle's room, with her bare arms clasped round his neck and her legs—as ever—dangling over the side of the chair. When Morley confessed that, if she had not kissed him first, he would have been afraid of being told that he was insulting her, she twined

herself about him like a snake and challenged him to insult her if he could.

By himself in the cooling air of Fleet Street, Morley experienced a reaction. At a "petting party" (as he believed these things were called in America) he was no match for Dora in audacity or resource; and he wondered from which of the youths who so regularly took her motoring on Sundays she had learnt her skill and why, after all these years, he was himself being honoured with her notice. It was one thing to seize her from a man like Presterwyck, as Morley had seized her that afternoon; it was something very different to have her resigned to him because Presterwyck was tired of her; and it was something different again if Presterwyck, who was himself married, now thought that it was more than time for Dora to be married too.

In some ways, Morley had to admit, he *was* a "blessed innocent"; and this in spite of his affiliation with Bohemia. Perhaps this was one of the things that drew women to him. "*His art is his only mistress. That's one of his greatest charms; he's so aloof. Those great, dreamy eyes . . .*"

Morley hurried on, impatient with himself for lapsing into this childish trick of inventing impossibly flattering speeches for other people to make about him. And yet there must be something, when Dora flung herself at him . . . She had restored his confidence. If she was attracted, others too . . . If only he got a chance of *meeting* people . . .

The primly domestic atmosphere of his father's house—blowing to meet him, Morley fancied, as he turned into Albany Terrace—drove Dora back into the place which she had occupied that morning.

"It's like going to a play that you've seen a dozen times before," he reflected, as the door was opened for him. "The same set, same props, same dresses, same lines and business. You wonder how they *can* go on doing it night after night . . . As I thought," he whispered, pausing on the threshold of the drawing-room.

And yet everything was different since his passage with Dora . . .

2

Mrs. Darville, in a high-cut black dress and with an illustrated paper on her knees, sat knitting a jumper for her daughter and waiting for dinner to be announced ("A Mary Jerrold part," Morley decided). She sustained a running commentary on the photographs in her paper and from time to time invited her husband to agree with her.

"These advertisements are positively indecent nowadays. Oh, darling, you're back, are you?," she exclaimed as she caught sight of her younger son. "I wish the Prince of Wales would find some nice girl to marry . . ."

Morley hurried upstairs and changed into a dark suit, hustling his gloomy brother away from the basin in the bathroom. Had Henry been an ordinary male of the species, he would have liked to talk a little about Dora—or about women generally—but in this strange household nobody ever confided in anybody else. Unless old Henry was playing as deep a game of his own . . .

How shocked they would be downstairs, Morley

chuckled, if they could even imagine that scene in the deserted office! And how hard it was for him to believe in it at a distance of half an hour and two or three miles! If Dora had been pretty . . . That wide mouth and turned-up nose, the untidy hair and neglected hands shocked his fastidiousness and, in so doing, made some primitive appeal which was wanting in the most correctly beautiful of Rose's friends. Very strange . . . ! And yet understandable. How otherwise could one explain the attraction of vulgar women, coarse jokes and obscene books for men reared in refinement? It was the old Adam, or perhaps the old Silenus, peeping out . . .

"And in this house they don't believe there's no sich a person!"

A gong, briskly beaten, brought him down to the drawing-room as his father, in a plum-coloured velvet smoking-jacket, laid the evening paper under his spectacle-case as a hint that he had not yet finished with it.

"Here's a latch-key," he told Morley. "If you fix it on your watch-chain . . . Did Rose say how late she was likely to be?," he enquired of the room at large.

"She isn't coming back for dinner . . ."

"Yes, yes, I know!," the head of the house rebuked his wife testily, "what I *said* was . . ."

As they descended to a dinner of soup and roast mutton, a cherry-pie and cheese, Morley found himself wondering—as at breakfast—what kind of conversation was at this moment enlivening the table and elevating the mind of H. G. Wells, for example, or George Moore, or Somerset

Maugham. The debate on Rose's probable return seemed good for half the meal. No, she had not committed herself to a definite time: Mrs. Darville presumed that she would just see how she got on. She was going home, was she not, enquired Henry, gallantly keeping the ball rolling, to have supper with her friends? Yes! And that was so nice, Mrs. Darville considered: they did not have to hurry over their game. And with these lovely long evenings it really did seem a shame to come in while it was still daylight. Talking of which, Mr. Darville contributed, wiping the soup from his moustache, it was an amazing thing this daylight-saving business had not been carried years before. There was everything in its favour, but you needed a war to shake the people of England out of their habits. Look at this Channel-tunnel scheme . . . ! And poor Mr. Willett (if that was his name) had actually died, Mrs. Darville lamented, before his idea was adopted . . .

They would not waste many seconds, at the rather formidable palace of truth for which Morley was bound this evening, in marshalling the arguments in favour of daylight-saving. Young Horace or Elizabeth Tidman would propose that the speaker be no longer heard.

"How much longer I can stand this self-satisfied barbarianism . . ." he muttered.

3

When at length he reached Dora's block of mansions, Morley was half afraid that she might

have started without him; but, after climbing to the top of the building, he was greeted by a smell of fried fish and the sound of a gramophone through the door bearing her name. In answer to his ring, she appeared—still in the sleeveless green blouse and short skirt that she had been wearing all day—and let him into a low attic with a gas-fire at one end and an open door, giving on to a bathroom, at the other. One corner, partly screened, was occupied by a wash-hand-stand. The bed, piled with cushions, served by day as a divan. And a dining-table, with a broken chair-back in place of a missing leg, held the remains of a meal, a mound of books, scattered clothes, a tin of cigarettes and a half-empty box of chocolates.

"Shall I . . . wait downstairs till you're ready?," asked Morley in faint embarrassment at the sight of so much intimate disorder. He avoided her eyes and began to turn over her books. *The Physiology of Marriage*, in two volumes; *Sex and Character; Ideal Love*, with a note on the jacket to say that it was issued only to registered medical practitioners . . . "You didn't say what time I was to come . . ."

"Oh, you won't be in the way. You really want to drag me out? Well . . ."

Morley tried not to watch too curiously as Dora drifted about the room collecting clothes off pegs and out of drawers. No one had ever charged him with an unbalanced love of tidiness, but he was glad that Rose and his mother were not being granted this glimpse of the way that Bohemia lived.

"I met my prodigal father a few minutes after

leaving you," Dora explained. "That made me late. He says that Hilary has brought off a really big thing with his last volume of poems. He'd just been round to congratulate him."

For a moment Morley could not remember who "Hilary" was; then he recalled, from earlier and curiously dispassionate confidences of Dora's, that this was the name of the young versifier who was generally supposed to be her mother's present lover. Oh, well, when one was in Rome . . . Did Mrs. Welwyn, he wondered, send a bouquet to her husband's mistress on the first night of a new ballet?

"That was decent of him," he answered, suddenly ashamed of himself for even wondering why it had not suited the Welwyns' convenience to have a divorce.

It was their affair and theirs alone!

"I should have thought it was the least he could do," said Dora. "I only hope he's right, but I don't trust father's judgement." Picking up a faded kimono, she retreated to the bathroom and continued the conversation to an accompaniment of splashing varied by occasional objurgations. "I hope to God that Mother Tidman won't be sitting too heavily on the whiskey . . . Oh, Hell! A perfectly *enormous* hole! . . . It's a gamble, you know. Uncle's been asking too many Perfect Ladies and Complete Gentlemen lately. They come in huge cars and think it's all a wonderful experience . . . D'you like the smell of this?," she enquired, emerging from the bathroom with a comb in one hand and a scent-spray in the other. "You can squirt some on me while I do my hair."

Letting the kimono slip to the ground, she stood before Morley in an exiguous sheath of green silk, with broken shoulder-straps which she was trying to fasten with pins.

"You haven't heard who's going to be there to-night?," he asked with a determined effort to hide the suburban squeamishness which he felt at the sight of so much bare flesh.

If some friend of Rose's had offered to help her change after their lawn-tennis . . .

"No . . . . I should think that ought to do, it's frightfully expensive stuff. Have you seen a lip-stick anywhere? Ah, here we are! *Don't* we take a lot of trouble to make ourselves attractive? I met somebody the other day who said that no woman should ever let her husband see her till she was properly dolled up: men liked to think that your hair waved naturally and you never had to plaster your face with cream. I can't think people are such fools as that."

"I'm not sure that I *do* like to see girls making up in public places . . ."

"But in private, like this, the more you see of me the better you're pleased? I'm always supposed to have rather a pretty figure. You admire it?" She thrust her face forward until Morley caught her in his arms and kissed her. "So you're human after all? And now I must make up all over again!"

Taking a hand-glass from the table, she curled herself among the cushions on the divan and beckoned Morley to her side. He went uneasily, once again feeling that he was no match for her and that she must be despising him for his shy awkwardness. If she had had a few more clothes on, if the room

had not been filled with evening sunshine, he would have felt less sheepish.

"What did you tell the good lady who warned you against making up in public?," he asked.

"I said her advice was wasted on me, as I should never have to bother about a husband," answered Dora, dabbing earnestly at her lips.

"Are you against marriage in principle?"

"Not in the least." Dora scrambled off the divan and thrust her head and arms into a dress. "I think it's the only thing for some people. It all depends on what you've seen of the holy state at close quarters." She picked up two half-crowns and a latch-key from the mantelpiece and thrust them inside her stocking. "If you're coming back here, you must loot some drink from Uncle. And, if we don't like it, for God's sake don't let's stay. You can hire a taxi and take me to Richmond or somewhere."

4

Morley felt somewhat more at ease by the time they reached the street.

"As a matter of fact, old Uncle's menagerie parties always amuse me . . . ," he began.

Dora said nothing; and he knew that she was disappointed in him. Well, she must not be in too much of a hurry.

"I always feel that, if I could bring my parents here, it would be so good for them," he continued. " Do you imagine that Margaret Kennedy had this place in mind when she wrote *The Constant Nymph?*

GOVT GRANT COLLEGE

The young Tidmans might have stepped out of a literary 'Sanger's Circus'. They all of them write, they all of them say what they think with the same rather mordant frankness . . ."

Whether Dora was listening or not, she made no answer; and Morley, well aware that he was talking to cover his own sense of constraint, lapsed into silence which remained unbroken until they reached the Tidmans' house and she roused to ask whether he wanted to stare at celebrities or listen to music.

"Let's find out what's happened to the family," suggested Morley. There was no one of any consequence in the front rooms; and, to judge by the sounds from the studio at the back, the pianist had not progressed farther than Debussy, whom the Tidman set considered to be old-fashioned. "If there's anybody interesting, Isabel or Marcus will have got hold of him."

Dora nodded absently; and they wandered from one room to another, downstairs and up, until they discovered Irene and Marcus Tidman sprawling on the bed of their sister Elizabeth and debating at the top of their voices how new life should be instilled into the weary pages of their father's paper. The party, evidently, was boring; and in this house no one had time to be bored.

"Come in, come in!," Elizabeth called out, as Dora put her head round the door. "I'm supposed to have 'flu, but you ought to keep the germs away if you smoke. Come in, Morley! We're planning a powerful new serial for the *Review* and we can't agree who shall write it. Help yourself to a drink and give us your views."

Morley poured some whiskey into a tooth-glass and cleared himself a corner on the already crowded bed. It would give his people a stimulating jolt if they could be admitted to this scene too! Elizabeth's thin cheeks were flushed and her green eyes shining with fever, but in the throes of creation no one seemed to mind that. Marcus, bent over a writing-block until only his black hair and a strip of sallow forehead could be seen, was blowing a cloud of smoke that made the invalid gasp for breath. And Irene, cross-legged at her sister's feet, was eating grapes and murmuring "No, blast you, *no!*" to every suggestion that any one made.

"Why don't you each write a chapter?," asked Morley, lighting a cigarette from a warm, rubber-scented packet that Elizabeth had extracted from the bed-clothes.

"And set me to edit the lot," added Dora, elbowing her way between Marcus and Irene. "There's a most infernal crowd on this bed! I suppose birth-control wasn't properly understood when your good parents married. . . . Yes! Five thousand words to each chapter; and every one goes on where the last has left off. That's better than a cut-and-dried plot."

Marcus Tidman looked up from his writing and began to sharpen his pencil. The shavings fell on Dora's stockings and were brushed by her into a confused pool of books, matches and torn paper in the middle of the bed.

"If you'll chuck the serial idea, I'll give you a dream of a book," he promised. "Go through all the popular successes of the last few years and

find out what it is that the public really likes. After all, that's the way films are made: so many feet of eroticism, so many yards of religiosity, one reel of hair's-breadth escapes and two of mother-love. Why not a novel on the same lines?"

"I don't feel it would hang together very well," said Morley. "Edgar Wallace merging in P. G. Wodehouse with an interlude of Phillips Oppenheim . . ."

"It's the editor's business to see it does." Marcus blew the lead-filings from his fingers, chucked Dora under the chin and seized his writing-block. "First of all make a list of the ingredients. A school setting. The public loves an idealized version of its own childhood. For the public-school chapter you can boil down Ian Hay, Hugh Walpole, Compton Mackenzie . . . And Walpole reminds me," he continued, writing rapidly. "The cathedral city is a certain winner nowadays. Can you mug up Michael Sadleir and Trollope, Elizabeth?"

"If you like. Our young hero is to be the son of a canon? *The Old House in the Close* . . . Mackenzie reminds me that the public loves its strolling player. Is there any reason our hero shouldn't join a touring company? I could do that part. Wasn't I born in a dressing-room?"

With a smile hovering about his mouth, Marcus wrote rapidly:

"He can go on the stage when he comes down from Oxbridge, but I want to give him a season's hunting first. Gilbert Frankau, you know. We'll turn young Horace on for that: he's our Frankau

expert. I don't think our friend can stick to the stage for more than a chapter: I want him to take service with a financial superman so that we can shew the public how the rich live at any hour of the day or night. The Arnold Bennett touch. I'll take that, if nobody else wants it."

His sister Elizabeth raised herself in bed and seized the writing-block.

"You must remember to leave the young man pretty sick of plutocracy at the end of the chapter," she enjoined. "I want him to have a stimulating five thousand words with H. G. Wells, cleaning up our muddled society and making a fine thing of life."

"That means politics," objected Dora.

"You can ruin his political career before it begins," Irene suggested, "if you tie him up with some one else's wife. *'I cannot remember when or why Florence became my mistress . . .'* You know, the *New Machiavelli* sort of thing."

Marcus shook his head and possessed himself forcibly of the writing-block.

"We must keep him pure and unspotted for the present," he insisted. "He can fall in love as much as you like and break his heart on every page . . ."

"In the Robin Allerdyce manner?," Morley enquired, with resentful memories of the book at which he had glanced earlier in the day. "Every Allerdyce hero allows himself to be separated from every heroine for the most lofty and unconvincing reasons."

"Hence 'the faint melancholy which we have come to associate with Mr. Allerdyce's later work',"

Marcus quoted. "Will you see to that, Morley? Keep it pure, at all costs. I want to wind things up by making every one commit suicide—in a green hat—for the sake of purity." He yawned and threw his papers on the floor. "If this is what the public really wants, the public shall have it. And then some. I'm going downstairs to see if there's any food left. Any one coming?"

"I am," said Morley.

The others were clustering, with heads bent close together, over the scribbled *scenario* of the novel; but he was tired of the game and glad of an excuse to get away. Good heavens, they might jest about parodying the popular novelists, but the popular novelists parodied themselves, turning out novel after novel, as Yardley or Pears turned out cake after cake of soap. The libraries and their public asked nothing better: they knew precisely where they were with a Brown novel or a Smith novel, as a chemist knew precisely where he was with Yardley or Pears soap; and the supply was as regular as the coming of night and day, a novel every six or twelve months and a new case of soap whenever the last began to run low.

"But I don't know why old Uncle minds my saying: '*If this is the public taste, God help the public!*'," Morley sighed, as he went down to the dining-room where Mrs. Tidman in an "art-green" robe of the eighteen-eighties, wearily mounted guard over the decanters.

The party was disappointing: no big lions, no good talk and an uncomfortable feeling that he had got himself into an awkward corner with Dora. It was a pity she was in such a tearing hurry to

make sure of him; a pity for both their sakes. After all, it was only this morning . . .

He wandered out of the dining-room and found her talking to their host in the hall.

"Ah, Morley, I haven't seen you all the evening," said Tidman. "Miss Welwyn has been telling me about your great new enterprise . . ."

"If we can discover the trick, it ought to be a gold-mine to us. What the public wants . . . Marcus has entrusted me with a job after my own heart, a Robin-Allerdyce chapter. I'm going to the country for Whitsun and I thought of tackling it at once."

Tidman smiled to himself and drew an engagement-book out of his pocket.

"You won't be going before the Saturday, will you?," he asked. "We have our monthly dinner at the Critics Club on the Friday; and I wanted you to come as my guest."

"That's very kind of you."

"Not a bit of it! I think it will do you no harm to meet some of the people you pillory so freely! You can then decide whether it *is* all a trick. . . . I can't sit with you, as I'm in the chair, but if you can persuade this young lady to come . . ."

Morley looked at Dora, who nodded with the same listlessness that she had exhibited all the evening.

"Who's the guest of honour?," she asked.

Tidman began to answer, then changed his mind.

"That you'll see when you get there," he told them. "Are you off? Well, good-night."

5

As there was no taxi in sight, they set out on foot, walking in silence for the first part of the way and slowly for all. Arguing with old Uncle and joking with the young Tidmans, Morley had been able to keep his mind off this aftermath of the party; but within ten minutes, five minutes, two minutes he had to decide what he was going to do when they arrived at Dora's block of flats.

The more he thought of his own inexperience, the more dangers Morley discovered in putting himself further into this young woman's power. Utterly indifferent to what the world thought of her, she would never understand that other people might be less indifferent; and it was only a question of time before Albany Terrace heard with horror that one of its sons had contracted an illicit alliance. One might deny it, but Dora would boast of it. Danger number one. There was then the danger that her parents might demand explanations. It would be a sorry ending to have a pistol put to one's head and told that one had to marry Dora, the more so if one were tricked or blackmailed into assuming responsibility for somebody else's child. And, if he were asked whether he could count on Dora for a straight deal, Morley knew he must answer that he would not trust her a yard. When a girl claimed the right to decide what rules she would keep, it was no good appealing to a code which she had rejected in advance.

"I'm glad you're coming to this dinner," he

said, as the silence became oppressive. "I've had no chance of talking to you all the evening."

"I've been before. They're quite amusing sometimes," Dora answered.

"We don't have to dress, do we? I want to get into the country that night."

"Oh, it's quite informal . . . I observe you don't ask me to come too, Morley."

A taxi rolled opportunely by; and he hailed it in a desperate hope of gaining time. If they drove to Richmond, as she had suggested . . .

The driver of the taxi stared ahead of him and gently accelerated.

"I'm afraid the accommodation would be rather a difficulty," Morley answered. "You could come down for the day, of course, and we'd picnic together somewhere. Sedge Farm, the place is called."

"That sounds almost too idyllic for my urban tastes," Dora mocked. "Bread and cheese under the spreading Burnham Beech . . . Well, here we are. Good-night, Morley, and thanks for seeing me home."

So she did not expect him to come up with her! Morley experienced a flooding sense of relief which instantly turned to disappointment. After being keyed-up all day . . .

"Are you trying to get rid of me?," he asked with an attempt at mastery.

"Yes. I think you'd better go home. It doesn't amuse me particularly to have my hand held. Enjoy yourself at Burnham . . ."

"But I shall see you before then!"

Dora's face twisted in an unlovely grimace.

"Isn't it rather a waste of time?," she asked.

"Your trouble, my poor boy, is our old friend, the Œdipus complex: what-would-mummy-think sort of thing. Or perhaps it's the Narcissus complex. I admit that to-day you really seemed to break free for a minute. I don't know whether you did yourself too well at lunch . . ."

"I haven't the faintest idea what you're driving at."

Dora turned on her heel and began to mount the steps to her flat:

"Then you're a fool or a liar. Perhaps a bit of both. I don't mind," she continued with an ironical assumption of patience. "I'm just trying to understand. When you were pawing and kissing me, I thought you must have discovered that you were some sort of a man after all. When you came here this evening, with flashing eyes, like a monarch of the glen . . ."

She stopped with a hoot of laughter, pointing a derisive finger at his flowing cloak and tasselled cane.

"When I came here this evening," Morley answered, struggling with his anger, "I wanted to talk seriously to you. I feel a certain responsibility . . ."

"*Gosh!* Can't you leave that to me? It *is* the Œdipus complex, Morley: this reverence-for-women business, wanting them all to be like mother. But you should be consistent! You oughtn't to have helped me to dress this evening . . . Do you want to come up or don't you?"

Morley looked at her with a frown. The pert, common little face looked almost pretty in the half-light; and the wide mouth gave him a vague sense that he had been cheated.

"What's the time?," he asked.

"Oh, don't come if you don't want to!"

Her cloak swung open as she turned away; and the sight of her bare arms reminded him of that afternoon when they had twined about his shoulders.

"I should like to come . . .," he began, moistening his lips.

Dora straightened her back and shook the hair out of her eyes.

"You'll certainly regret it if you don't," she remarked with odd detachment. "On the other hand . . . No! We shall both regret it if you do. We're jangling, you see, my dear, and that's always a dangerous state. You'd better wait till you're rather more sure of yourself."

Bending forward on tiptoes, she kissed him on the mouth. Morley put his arm round her shoulders and held her fast.

"It's quite early still," he whispered.

Dora shook her head without troubling to remind him that it had seemed too late a moment before.

"Some other time. *Any* other time," she answered. "As soon as you know where you are," she mocked him.

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CHAPTER FOUR

THE LIONS' DEN

I

DURING the week that intervened before the Critics Club dinner, Morley found that Dora's warning had set itself to the refrain of a war-time music-hall song and was running in his head till he was driven to whistle loudly in the hope of breaking the rhythm and drowning the air.

"*You'll regret it if you don't!*
"*You'll regret it if you don't!*
"*But you'll both of you regret it if you do!*"

Already he was regretting that he had allowed Dora to send him away: his nerves were on edge, he could not get her out of his thoughts. And yet he was disgusted with himself for letting his mind become obsessed in this way: there should surely be something more than physical appetite to draw a man and woman together. . . .

A week without seeing Dora proved that he could evidently exist without her, but not—he must admit honestly—without reminding himself daily that he was going to meet her at the end of the week and that she was ready to receive him as soon as he knew his own mind. And did he? She attracted him with her pert manner and husky

voice; still more by her directness. Accustomed to a life that was at least secure and presentable, Morley shuddered to recall the squalor of Dora's one room in Fulham, but he admired her for living there while he wallowed, fretfully grunting, in the smug comfort of Albany Terrace. He admired her for flouting "respectability" when he was anxiously asking himself what his shocked parents would say if they heard he had a mistress.

"*But we shall both of us regret it if you do!*"

The refrain repeated itself maddeningly as he packed his suit-case and made his way to the "Bleeding Heart" in Hatton Garden. To-night, perhaps, Dora would let him see that he had missed his chance. He would regret that. And maybe he would be regretting it now if he had taken it. . . .

2

LEAVING his suit-case downstairs, Morley mounted to an ante-room where members and guests were looking for their names on a table-plan. The young woman to whom he had surrendered his peace of mind was not yet come, but he sighted his host and was at once bidden to come and meet the guest of honour.

"I don't think you know Robin Allerdyce, do you?," asked old Uncle. "This is Morley Darville, Robin, a valued friend and colleague."

An automatic exchange of bows was followed by an automatic handshake, but Morley was too angry to say anything. This, then, was why old

Uncle had told Dora that they would see on the night who the principal guest was! He had heard of the proposed Allerdyce parody and had thought it would be a rare jest to bring the tormentor and his victim together. Well, it did not greatly matter if their mock "best-seller" had to be abandoned, but Uncle was making the mistake of his life if he imagined that he could muzzle honest opinion by shewing off a man like Allerdyce and then saying: "*Not such a bad creature, after all, eh?*" Allerdyce had probably asked—over the second cigar and third brandy—why the *Literary Review* never had a good word to say for him; and Uncle, apologizing for the young intransigent on his staff, had no doubt promised to arrange a meeting. "*If you throw him a civil word, you'll win him over, body and soul,*" he had probably predicted. "*You know what these unrecognized geniuses are!*"

Morley was determined that no one should win him over; and he was helped by the timely arrival of Dora.

"There's Miss Welwyn!," he exclaimed. "I'll bring her to you, Uncle . . ." He hurried across the room. "Evening, my dear! D'you see what we're in for? I suppose this is to give me a lesson in respect to my elders and betters. Well, it's your turn now!"

He stood aside, as Dora—after a husky "Oh, *Christ!*"—shook hands with her host, and studied the programme of speeches. The Critics Club must be hard up for guests of honour when they coupled the name of Robin Allerdyce with the toast of "Literature"! And the guest of honour, at

this moment signing a roll that held the names of Swinburne and Stevenson, must have a strange effrontery or a stranger taste in humour! What was it old Gilbert was supposed to have said after the quarrel with Sullivan? "*If this is music, thank God I'm not a musician!*" If the novels of Robin Allerdyce were "literature", one would have to thank God one was not literary.

Morley walked round the room, inspecting the framed portraits of past chairmen and watching the group round old Uncle out of the corner of his eye. Burnand and Clement Scott . . . The fellow was being taken as seriously as he took himself! "Such *an honour to meet you, Mr. Allerdyce!*" Andrew Lang, Archer, Walkley . . . Here were two blushing maidens armed with copies of his own books for the fellow to sign! For those who liked that kind of author, that was the kind of author those people unquestionably liked. . . .

Morley was startled by the bitterness of resentment which this meeting had called forth. He could forgive Uncle his misplaced humour; he could forgive Allerdyce his undaunted conceit; he could not forgive these others for bowing and scraping to some one who was nothing but a very prolific, very successful society novelist, on whom such critics as Desmond MacCarthy and J. C. Squire never wasted a line or a thought.

"And if I tell people to overhaul their values, I'm charged with being jealous of some one else's success!"

The cluster round the chairman was thinning; and Morley obtained his first unhurried view of

the principal guest. He was unexpectedly old—nearer fifty than forty—and, in spite of his well-fitting clothes, curiously battered. The black hair was retreating from his lined forehead; the melancholy brown eyes looked as though he worked too much by artificial light; and his cheeks were deeply furrowed. Presumably one went the pace in the Dukery, or in London on the proceeds of writing about the Dukery.

Old Uncle was whispering to Dora that they had nearly mislaid "the great man".

"I told him to come straight up," he explained, "but he was so shy that I had to go down and fetch him."

"I should have thought he might have got over shyness by now," said Morley. "He must have been lionized enough . . ."

"Perhaps he feels that the parts have been reversed to-night and that he's Daniel in the lions' den," old Uncle laughed. "Hungry young reviewers prowling all round him. . . . Well, I think we might begin to go in."

Morley found his place and watched the members and their guests gazing reverently at the high table. Within twenty hours, at certain tea-parties in Lewisham or Turnham Green, certain of this night's company would be enhancing their social value by saying: "*Robin Allerdyce? Yes, I know him. Not* well, *of course: he goes out so little. I had a* glimpse *of him last night* . . ." And, if the furtively curious glances of their neighbours meant anything, they were speculating about the identity of the man and girl described on the plan of the table as "*Mr. Tidman's Guests*". What a

queer race we were, Morley exclaimed: the deference that we paid even to the humblest dependents of the famous! As though a man acquired some added consequence by being some one else's cousin . . .

He became conscious that Dora was not listening.

"What did you make of the fellow?," he asked, before she could refer to his week-long absence from Fleet Street.

"I think I could have deduced him from his books," she answered. "He's a perfect little gentleman, with all the qualities and defects of the well-bred . . ."

Morley reviewed her choice of epithet with mild surprise. Well-bred? His standing complaint against "society novelists" was that they were—to a man—middle-class in origin and outlook and that they invented the world which they pretended to describe.

"Why do you regard good breeding as a handicap?," he asked.

"Because of the inhibitions it imposes," Dora answered. "Allerdyce might be a good writer if he could let himself go, but it's not 'good taste' to wear your heart on your sleeve and to tell the naked truth of what you feel about God and the royal family and the men whose salt you've eaten (I'm sure he uses that phrase!) and the women you've slept with (I'm sure he wouldn't dream of using *that!*). He can never hope to be a Dostoieffski. You and he have a lot in common, Morley, though it's natural to him and you've only picked it up," she added with her habitual brutality of candour.

3

So long as he could make the guest of honour their chief subject of discussion, Morley felt that he must not resent wounding asides. Dora was in one of her difficult moods. If he hoped to recover his lost ground with her . . .

Glancing down the table, he observed for the first time that Allerdyce was wearing an Authentic tie. The familiar colours, if he had a right to them, were surprising in such a place, on such a man. Morley had never thought of Allerdyce as a cricketer or as an Oxford man; and, though school and university badges were no proof of breeding, he was faintly disconcerted by the overthrow of his cherished theory that this indefatigable chronicler of aristocratic inanities had started life as a reporter on a provincial paper.

"I don't know that I agree with you about this 'handicap'," he told Dora after a pause. "You might just as well say that a man who writes good English is so tied up by rules of grammar that he can't write a good book . . ."

"And there's a whole lot of truth in that!," she retorted. "Stevenson never wrote good dialogue because he was afraid of being colloquial. That's the trouble with well-bred amateurs. Obviously no 'gentleman' would nail his model on a cross in the hope of getting a truer Crucifixion than any one else had ever painted . . ."

"I imagine the police would interfere," said Morley.

"Of course they would! That's the strength of the well-bred: they impose their standards on the rest of the world. And that's our besetting weakness as a nation in consequence, that we try to be 'gentlemen' first and something else afterwards. We nearly lost the last war by trying to fight it in a 'gentlemanly' way. The 'gentlemen' are always beaten by the professionals in politics, money-making, business, sport. As for art! Well, the 'gentlemen' win there, because they've frightened the artists off the field with their slimy talk of 'taste' . . ."

Dora was now headed off dangerous personalities; and they continued to argue with vehemence and an amicable disregard for the courtesies of polite discussion until the chairman stood up to propose the king's health.

"We must continue this later," Morley whispered. If he could borrow a little of her recklessness! With her to inspire him, he might do something big. Well, it was for him to decide. She was waiting—he felt it every time that their conversation was suspended—for his answer. "Our dinner has still to be earned," he added, as Tidman stood up a second time. "Well, I don't envy Uncle his job."

The speech, so far as Morley troubled to listen, was an unconvincing succession of insincere compliments. Their guest was a novelist "in the great English tradition"; he was, further, "that rare combination, a scholar and a writer of romance"; last, but not least—after a great deal more of the same kind—he was a man—popular and justly popular—who would have satisfied one of Kipling's tests of

manhood by being able to talk with crowds and keep his virtue . . .

"Can he walk with kings, nor lose the common touch?," Morley enquired maliciously.

Then, mindful of his promise to give the shy speaker all encouragement, he tapped perfunctorily on the table as Allerdyce rose and formally thanked his audience for their kindness in drinking his health. It was a great pleasure, he told them, to be the guest of the club, a great privilege to have his name coupled with the toast of "Literature" and a great problem to discover why he had been chosen to fill this place.

"Your chairman," he reminded them with a slight frown, "hinted that, as I had been more criticized than most men, I deserved more than most the chance of retaliating on my critics. Ladies and gentlemen, that is a chance which I have no desire to take. Not, as a cynic might think, because you have not done with me yet, but because I have no reason to feel vengeful. If I resented criticism, I could have refrained from writing; but, looking back over the last twenty years, I feel that, if I have not always merited the lashings which I have received, I have quite as often received a laurel-wreath that I did not merit. Modern criticism is on the whole very fair. Critics have rediscovered the first meaning of their name and are content to be judges rather than executioners. And the only one that I should like to see put out of business is of a type that was old when the first cave-man scratched his first rude design and will be still evergreen when the ultimate troglodyte emerges in the last ice-age to chip his message on a convenient glacier."

As the speaker paused, Morley looked up, alertly defensive.

"That is the man," Allerdyce continued, "who damns a book for not being something that the author never meant it to be. Thackeray's own daughter asked him why he did not write books like Mr. Dickens—you remember his magnificent reply? 'My dear, I wish I could!'—and there are always certain critics, so-called, who have wanted Meredith to write like Hardy and James to write like Conrad. Mr. Chairman, whatever else this may be, it is not criticism. I submit in all humility that the first duty of a critic is to understand what a writer is trying to do, the second to say how far he has succeeded . . ."

Morley found himself groping to recover one of Allerdyce's sentences before it was left too far behind. "*The first duty of a critic* . . ." There was nothing particularly arresting about the sentiment, but he had heard it lately on other lips and—for some reason—it had annoyed him. "*The first duty* . . ." Was it Dora? Or old Uncle? Morley sat suddenly upright. It was old Uncle lecturing him on the way he carved up "established" authors! Had Uncle taught the phrase to Allerdyce? Or had he learnt it from him? Was "Robin Allerdyce" the name that was "a household word"? Had Allerdyce set that trap with the anonymous book? Had Uncle invited them for the fun of seeing them meet?

Morley sat grimly inattentive till the last speech ended. Then he hurried round to bid his host good-night before Allerdyce got a chance of slipping away.

"You off already? Oh, but you're going to the country aren't you?," asked Tidman.

"I'm afraid I've missed the last train. It doesn't matter. I just wanted a word with Mr. Allerdyce . . ."

The tone or the set expression caused old Uncle to purse his mouth as though he expected a scene; then his dull eyes lighted up with mischief.

"Why don't you make him give you a lift?," he asked. "He's going down to Wiltshire himself. Robin! Is Burnham much out of your way? Here's a young man who's missed his train . . ."

Morley tried to break in, but Allerdyce was before him:

"But I shall be delighted!"

"And this young lady . . .?"

4

It all happened so quickly that Morley was robbed of resistance. As though old Uncle were saying that, if they wanted to fight, they must fight elsewhere, he hurried them downstairs and into their cloaks. With his own hands he gave Morley's suit-case to the chauffeur; with his own pencil and *menu* he sketched the way to Fulham.

Morley sat down without troubling to thank his late host or his new one. If Uncle imagined that a forced ride at some one else's expense imposed any obligation or secured any protection for the bloated owner, he would soon find out that other people were not so easy to "square" as he was. Allerdyce, meanwhile, was—in his "well-bred"

way—putting them at their ease. A pleasant evening, did not Miss Welwyn think?, except for those who had to make speeches or listen to them. Was Mr. Darville going to play golf at Burnham Beeches?

"God, no!," Morley answered rudely. "I've not fallen *that* far. I'm going to work."

"A new book?"

The question brought about a temporary check. So the fellow knew he wrote books. Presumably old Uncle had told him, perhaps adjuring him to speak an encouraging word to a beginner and explain how long most novelists had to wait for recognition.

"You ought to tell Mr. Allerdyce what you're doing," Dora murmured. "It was young Marcus Tidman's idea . . ."

Morley sat without speaking. When Dora got out, he would get out with her and shew whether it paid to be facetious at his expense. First, however, he must have an understanding with Allerdyce on neutral territory. "*Before we go any farther*," he proposed to begin, "*I wish to ask you a question. I don't want to abuse your hospitality. And, if we come to blows, I shouldn't like to injure a valuable Rolls-Royce* . . ." He stood up, as the car stopped, and bent forward to look at the bonnet. "*Your valuable Daimler* . . . ," he substituted. Then, before he could reach the door, it had slammed; and Allerdyce was asking if he knew the road to Burnham.

"Yes, but before we go any farther . . . ," Morley began. The car started with a jerk; and he fell back into his corner. "I can't accept the hospitality of your car . . . ," he tried.

"My dear fellow, you're saving me a lonely and boring drive. . . . I suppose you don't know any one who'd like to buy a family bus? This thing came to me from my father, but it's entirely out of keeping with my modest style of living. People tell you," he continued with a laugh, "that it's terribly hard to give up things you're used to; I believe it's much harder to get used to things you don't need. If ever you've been poor, that is."

"You can't have been greatly pinched in the last ten years," Morley commented acidly.

If there was one form of cant that he hated more than another, it was the sham craving of the pampered rich for simplicity. It would be time enough for Allerdyce to praise a modest style of living when he had been jostled in trams by the proletariat which he so fastidiously excluded from his novels.

"Oh, I'm going back much farther than that! Until I left Eton I'd been lapped in luxury: a big house . . . You must let me know if you're ever down Dorsetshire way . . . Everything was delightful until I grew up and my father began to talk about careers. He naturally wanted me to go into the diplomatic, but I'd made up my mind at Oxford that I wanted to write. There was an appalling row—long ended, thank heaven!—and I was told that, if I went my own way, I mustn't expect any help. I was very poor indeed the first five or six years. It's curious," he digressed, as though he disliked talking about himself, "how many fathers are obsessed by the idea of making their sons follow in their own footsteps. I don't know whether you found that?"

Morley wanted to say that he would be happy to answer any questions when Allerdyce had answered the one which he had been trying to ask for the last half-hour. The longer they put off coming to grips, the unpleasanter it would be for both of them; but he felt that his opponent was trying to steal an advantage and that he must assert himself. Well, the diplomatic service could be matched with one of the learned professions; his Cambridge could profitably be played against Allerdyce's Oxford.

"Oh, my father can't see an inch beyond the law!," he answered. "I was trapped into eating my dinners the moment I left Eton . . ."

They were now all square over schools.

"And he didn't like your giving up your practice?"

That, Morley thought, was a graceful, if asinine, way of putting it. Any one with eyes could see that he was still too young to have a practice worth giving up; and his father, far from objecting, had only said for the twentieth time that a young man who could not make up his mind should never have been called to the Bar. Time wasted, fees wasted . . .

"I daresay he'd have been resigned if I'd sprung into fame with my first book . . ."

Allerdyce sighed and lay back in his corner, inhaling gratefully the first fragrance of country air after the tar and burnt oil of London.

"But who does?," he asked. "My first three fell completely flat; and I had to keep myself by reporting speeches at dinners like the one we've just been attending. I'd learnt shorthand and

typing when I was working for the F.O. Later on I got some reviewing to do. . . . Yes, I had to live so sparingly in those years that I lost all taste for even such luxury as I'd been brought up to. Nowadays I find it rather embarrassing. And in our trade a reputation for affluence is the one thing that you're never forgiven. I'm afraid authors are small-minded about that. How often have we heard people—men and women who really ought to know better—bandying the sale-figures of their rivals and deciding sooner or later that, when your circulation reached a certain mark, you were no longer a serious writer! I've no doubt that some people would regard this car as a vulgar display of ill-gotten wealth, instead of considering that it might conceivably have come to me at my father's death, with many other liabilities that looked like assets."

They drove in silence for some minutes, while Allerdyce slowly filled and lighted an elderly briar. The sight of it twisted Morley's conscience with a reminder that he had pictured this successful "society novelist" as a man of low birth and no breeding who tore about the country in a Rolls-Royce, smoking monstrous cigars and dictating to a secretary his mass-production novels of so-called "high life".

"You can't very well escape a 'reputation for affluence'," he mustered courage to say, "when the people you write about are all so disgustingly rich. If, for a change, you gave us a charwoman with a drunken husband and rickety children . . ."

"I should be out of my depth in the first paragraph! I *can* only write about the sort of

people I know. You're keeping an eye on the road, I hope? Hickson has less than no bump of locality. If we hadn't been together in the war, at least until the Welsh Guards were formed and he exchanged his thistle for a leek, I should get rid of him and go back to my two-seater. With the ever-present fear of the workhouse . . ."

Morley found his attention wandering. He had never thought of Allerdyce as a guardsman. Had he been asked, he would have relegated him —in the war—to a safe position at home.

"He's too good a driver to be out of a job long."

"Oh, I was thinking of the workhouse for myself," Allerdyce laughed. "It's quite absurd, really, but I got an obsession in those early days about providing for the future and never forgetting that popularity was the most capricious of fairies. . . . There'd be less bitterness and fewer tragedies in our trade, Darville, if more people recognized that: we're public entertainers, we may have a long run or a short run, but it can't last for ever . . ."

As the car whirred through the night, ploughing gigantic furrows in the darkness, Morley sat back with his eyes half-closed, content in spite of himself to postpone his quarrel until he had studied his companion more closely. A public entertainer he called himself quite frankly. And yet, when he broke with his father, he must have had better stuff inside him. To Morley, the public which Allerdyce brought himself to "entertain" was perfectly represented by his own parents, who had never thought for themselves and were "enter-

tained" in different moods and at different moments by books with happy endings, plays with their favourite actors in them, sermons by the Bishop of London, correspondence on spiritualism in the silly season and gossip about the last woman to swim the Channel and the latest man to fly the Atlantic.

"Do you ever study your public in a place like Mudie's?"

"Yes! And I'm furious if I hear the attendant say there's not much demand for my latest novel. My dear Darville, if any of us despised our audience as much as some of us pretend, we should have no truck with it. Our walls would be hung with our own pictures, carefully curtained; our shelves loaded with our own unpublished manuscripts. But I shall bore you if I go on talking shop. Have you any idea where we are?"

Morley shaded his eyes and looked into the night, but the car was running through flat and characterless country which he did not recognize. Glancing at his watch, he was amazed to find that he ought to have been at Burnham half-an-hour ago.

"I'm afraid I've forgotten to keep a look-out," he confessed.

Allerdyce reached for the speaking-tube, then let it fall and rapped on the front window as the car turned from the road, past a squat stone lodge and into a winding drive.

"We're there," he announced briefly. "Hickson must have thought you were coming to stay here. And I really think that's the best thing you can do, Darville."

"But . . . but where are we?," Morley stammered.

"Silham Park. The Silchesters, you know. Have you met any of them? They're the most hospitable people in the world . . ."

"But I can't butt in on total strangers at this hour of the night!"

"Well, you certainly can't get back to Burnham till to-morrow; and there's not a decent hotel nearer than Reading. To be quite frank, I'm *not* keen on sending Hickson there and back. He's had a long day. Of course, if you insist . . ."

Morley wasted or gained a few moments by audibly cursing his own folly. These people would regard him as a nuisance, if he came, and as an oaf, if he refused to come.

"Is the house full?," he temporized.

"Oh, no! There's Silchester, Lady Silchester, Aldermaston (the son, you know), Lady Agnes Menteith and her husband and the unmarried daughter, Lady Penelope. The guests are a member of parliament called Trott; a Mrs. Fildes; a Miss Allendale and old Sir Victor Winton, the shipping man. I can assure you they're all warranted not to bite; but if you'd rather go back to Reading . . . They'll be furious with me if they ever hear that I let you turn yourself away from their very door."

5

Morley stared out of the window as though he hoped that some one would emerge from the dark-

ness to make up his mind for him. At one moment he had told himself that he would not stay here, even if he had to cover the distance to Reading on foot; at another, when Allerdyce offered to send the car back, he was tempted to say: "*If you think I'm afraid to meet your grand friends, you're very much mistaken.*"

"If I come, I shall put all the responsibility on you," he said and knew that he had decided.

This was an odd ending to the far-away dinner at the "Bleeding Heart"! As the car wound in and out between grey clumps of beech-trees, Morley had to admit that he would have been disappointed if his protests had not been overruled. It would be amusing to walk, as it were, into the middle of a Robin-Allerdyce novel. This was the authentic setting! There were lights springing up before Hickson had rung the bell; and, as Allerdyce jumped out of the car, murmuring: "I shall be back in a minute. I just want to explain things to Silchy", two footmen—with a butler in the background—flung open the doors.

Though anything but afraid to meet Allerdyce's "grand friends", Morley was curious to see what they were like. Lady Silchester, he fancied, would be conspicuous by the length of her thin, pink nose; and Lady Agnes would be her mother's daughter. Sir Somebody Something, the shipping man, would be stout, red and bald, wearing a grey frock-coat and white waistcoat by day, like an advertisement of "the chairman" recommending his board to try a certain kind of throat-pastille. Lady Penelope—the name gave her away!—would

be a Robin-Allerdyce heroine, wistful and invertebrate . . .

Morley became alert at the sound of voices. Allerdyce was striding through the hall beside a small man with snow-white hair and peony complexion. Behind them, and directing operations in a slow, clear voice, walked a young woman with a sleepy bull-pup in her arms. The chauffeur threw open the door of the car; and Morley found himself enveloped in a welcome that paralysed his power of speech.

"My dear sir, this is a most fortunate accident! Come along in and have something to eat!"

"Mummie's gone to bed, Mr. Darville. I know you'll excuse her."

"Now then, Darville, let me introduce you to Lord Silchester, Lady Penelope Brayle."

"And Stanley! Don't forget my precious Stanley. He's *rather* sleepy at present, because he hasn't been alive long enough to get used to late hours . . ."

As he shook hands, Morley contrived to murmur "intolerable imposition."

"Delighted to see you, my dear boy!," cried Lord Silchester. "Any friend of Robin's. They're getting a room ready for you. Tell the man who's looking after you if you'd like any telephone-messages sent . . ."

"And make my brother lend you anything you want for the night," added Lady Penelope. "Daddy, I hate to criticize my elders, but it would have been more tactful *not* to say 'any friend of Robin's.' If you'd told Mr. Darville that you

were proud to welcome the author of *The Clown's Tragedy* . . ."

"Rank insincerity, m'dear! I've not read the book."

"I wasn't talking about sincerity; I was talking about tact," sighed Penelope. "Come along in, Mr. Darville . . ."

As Morley entered the house, he tried to remember who had used a phrase that evening about "the lions' den". . . .

PART TWO

CHAPTER ONE

A PROPHET ABROAD

I

"WELL, I promised you they wouldn't bite," said Allerdyce.

"Everybody's been extraordinarily kind," Morley answered a little dizzily. Here and now, if ever, was his chance of putting plain, simple questions and of speaking from the heart about abiding values in literature and library successes. He could not take it. These people had contrived to put him in a better mood than he had known for months. They seemed genuinely glad to see him. "I shall get them all straight in time," he laughed.

Of the imaginary portraits which he had sketched in the car, only one had come anywhere near the truth: Sir Victor was just the bald, fat and red-faced merchant-prince that he had pictured. Lady Agnes Menteith, when Morley came to think of it, was an elder edition of his own sister: plump, friendly and unaffected. There were one or two well-worn stage types: Mr. Trott, the earnest member of parliament with the cockney voice, and Mrs. Fildes,

the bright, pretty "society woman", invited for her power of galvanizing a lifeless party . . .

"You see now that it would never have done for me to let you slip away," Allerdyce continued.

"I don't think I required much pressing," said Morley.

He refrained from saying that he had been chiefly interested to see whether the party was typical of the society which Allerdyce habitually described. In fact, it was not. To be in character, the guests should surely have been playing *chemin-de-fer* instead of bridge. The women should have had backs bare to the waist and haggard faces, with long cigarette-holders protruding from scarlet lips. The men should have been drinking ominously brown brandies-and-sodas. Actually, to-night, Lord Aldermaston—who had points in common with old Henry!—had been content with barley-water, while his brother-in-law, Menteith, conducted a private orgy of hot lemon-juice to keep his weight down for riding.

"They've given you everything you want?," Allerdyce enquired. Morley and he were in adjoining rooms; and he was undressing with the communicating-door open. "If you'll let me know in the morning what time you want to start, Hickson will run you over."

"Thanks very much, but I can quite well go by train," said Morley.

No doubt Dora and old Uncle would be highly facetious at the collapse of his threats and boasts. There was at least no need for him to place himself under further obligations to Allerdyce.

"You'll be more independent with a car. You

see, Lady Silchester will certainly want to shew you the gardens: they're her mania. And, unless you're very careful, Silchy will carry you off to see his shorthorns . . ."

"If I hadn't been very careful," Morley interrupted, "Captain Menteith would have dragged me to some training-stable before breakfast!"

"Archie judges all men and women by their reaction to the animal horse. I always feel he tolerates poor Agnes as a necessary means of bringing good horsemen into the world."

"He sounds rather trying as a husband."

Allerdyce withdrew to his own room and came back in down-trodden slippers and a brown silk dressing-gown.

"Well, Agnes could get on with any one," he answered. "A sense of humour and a matter-of-fact mind . . . Not very subtile, but at least she's never troubled by a vague fancy that there's something wonderful, which is being kept from her, on the other side of the next range. And that, I take it, is Penelope's sickness of soul at the moment . . . However, I'm keeping you up."

"No, you're not." Morley took a cigarette and settled himself in an armchair. Cordial as these people doubtless were by nature and habit, he could not help feeling that he had scored something of a personal success. And, indeed, why not? Once he got away from home, he could make himself agreeable enough. In manner and looks . . . He found that he was staring at a cheval-glass and preening himself quite intolerably on the modelling of his head. "I wanted to check my own impressions. Now, our host!"

"An enthusiast!," Allerdyce replied without hesitation. "The gamut extends from early printed books to flint implements and, I'm afraid, stamps. In spirit, he's a *grand seigneur*, but he feels all that sort of thing ended a century ago and he's too sensible to die in any kind of last ditch. So he potters about with his collections, waiting for the tumbril to be announced. I'm sorry you're not staying longer, Darville: I love these people, I want to share them with somebody. If you're invited, don't lose the opportunity."

Morley shook his head and yawned. He had no suitable clothes, even if the Silchesters did anything so improbable as to hug a benighted stranger to their bosom. Besides, he would want to disagree with them so much, as soon as he had found his feet: to argue with Menteith about the futility of proving thirty times a week that one horse could run faster than another and to shake Aldermaston's political complacency.

"I've brought away a perfect load of work," he answered. "You've not exhausted the party yet. There's a Miss Somebody . . ."

"Rosemary Allendale? She's the serious, saintly kind who make the English aristocracy so generally respected, even if they make it ever so slightly dull. I suppose she'll marry Aldermaston some day. . . . Are they at all what you expected?"

Morley opened his windows and inspected the books on the table by his bed.

"I hoped they would be rather more like the characters in your books," he answered. "You enjoy the distinction of having created a Robin-Allerdyce heroine . . ."

"Am I ever allowed to forget it? You mean the bright young things who emerged in the second half of the war, nurtured in night clubs and weaned on cocktails? Yes, I wrote one or two books about them. They were a curious social phenomenon, but they no more belonged to this setting than a travelling circus belongs to the town where it stops for a night. Silchester would be dismayed if he thought you expected anything so desperate of Silham. . . . And now I've kept you up quite long enough! I'm rather a bad sleeper, so I'm apt to victimize other people . . ."

By the time that he got to bed, Morley discovered that Allerdyce had talked him awake; and he lay with the lights on, studying the room and thinking over their conversation. From the shape and size of the panelling he judged the house to be Queen Anne. In this room and the next, the furniture was his favourite walnut; and he remembered suddenly that Lady Penelope had said the original plans were drawn by Vanbrugh, but that the decoration was not finished until the time of the Adams. He wondered whether she would take him round in the morning.

"As a reward for trying to be intelligent about her father's shorthorns."

He wondered, too, whether she had read *The Clown's Tragedy*, or whether Allerdyce had whispered the title to her as old Uncle had no doubt

whispered it to him an hour or two earlier. For some reason she had been almost omitted from their discussion. Indeed, some might think that Allerdyce had run away before her name could be mentioned. Was it too sacred to be profaned by stranger lips?

Turning off the lights, he speculated lazily whether Lady Penelope was by chance responsible for what Marcus Tidman called "the note of wistfulness that we have come to associate with Mr. Allerdyce's later work". She had the required raven's-wing hair and big grey eyes. . . After all, the fellow had more than one type of heroine. After the war books, which had made his name, and the dreary chronicles of the "bright young things", which had done so much to lose it, came what might conveniently be called the "novels of frustration". If Lady Penelope had inspired them, she must have begun to frustrate Allerdyce's passion when she was about eighteen. Well, he would have been about forty then and might well have told her—*motif* number one—that he was too old for her. A year later—*motif* number two—she might have told him that she was too young for him. Then they might have taken it in turn for a couple of years and two more *motifs* to say that they were unsuitable in age. Always, Morley told himself with the scorn that bubbled up whenever he considered Allerdyce's work critically, they would part for the noblest reasons, always on a note of interrogation. The idea had become an obsession with the fellow. It would be exciting, though, to feel that one had met, was in the same house as, her whose face had launched a

thousand—or, at any rate, six—novels from that so busy pen.

"In the morning, perhaps . . . ," Morley yawned.

He was called at nine by a footman who asked whether he would breakfast downstairs or in his room. The sun was shining on the bed; and in the next room he could hear Allerdyce whistling to himself. Morley would have liked to go down and into the garden, but he felt suddenly shy of meeting so many strangers at once. Better to tackle them one by one; and better to study the way things were done in a house like this before he made any social error. The footman was emptying his basin, bringing in hot water, wrapping a towel round the can and taking away clothes to be brushed. Morley wondered whether they would comment unfavourably downstairs on the shops where he bought his shirts and shoes. . . .

Half-hoping that, if he made sounds of movement, Allerdyce would come in and tell him where to find a bathroom, he began to shave in front of an open window. The garden, in this early, slanting sunlight, made him hold his breath with delight that was almost physically painful. Tulips white and red, mauve and bronze, pink and yellow reared their gallant heads above an undulating sea of forget-me-not. The first of the irises were greeting the last of the hyacinths; and the blown apple-blossom was mingling with rare, backward clumps of daffodils. A late spell of frost, followed by an early drought, had thrown the seasons into confusion; and, while the lupins were already in flower, the great oaks girdling the lawn were still leafless.

No wonder, Morley reflected, that, with a place like this, gardening was Lady Silchester's "mania."

His thoughts reverted, for the first time in twelve hours, to Albany Terrace. As it was Saturday, the world's-workers were probably giving themselves a holiday. A "good" walk in the park to see the flowers and perhaps luncheon at one of the two restaurants at which Mr. Darville had been treated by his "dear father". An altercation, later, when half of them wanted to go on and the other half to return home . . .

"Time enough to think of all that when I get back!," Morley decided. "The heavenly *peace* of this place! I can't think that even *I* should want to bite anybody's head off at breakfast. And these others are too beautifully composed and tranquil for anything so vulgar! If you always live in a perfectly designed, perfectly proportioned house, does it give you a corresponding poise? . . ."

A balustraded terrace ran along the side of the house, separating it from a sloping lawn which mounted and merged imperceptibly with a park divided in two by an avenue of cedars. To judge from the coming and going below, his windows—Morley decided—must be over the dining-room. A weather-beaten, white-haired woman, presumably his hostess, came out with a plate of food which was instantly hidden by the bent heads and outstanding ruffs of three blue persians. She was hailed and kissed by Menteith, who hastened to tell her of the gallop which he had just witnessed. By daylight and in check riding-breeches with a high-collared khaki sweater, the spokesman of the bloodstock industry looked the part for which Allerdyce had

cast him. Small and thin-legged, with watchful brown eyes and a parchment skin, close-cropped black hair and a tooth-brush moustache, Menteith—deprived of a horse—looked only half-dressed, like a yachtsman ashore; and the faint impression of indecency which he created was only covered by his far less faint impression of having a horse waiting for him round the corner.

Morley went back to his shaving until the sound of new voices tempted him to look down again. Aldermaston and Trott were now seated on the stone balustrade, reading newspapers and—no doubt—exchanging political points. They sprang to their feet as Miss Allendale came out in a white skirt and knitted coat. Lord Silchester joined them with the day's reading of the rain-gauge, which Mrs. Fildes capped with the movements of her travelling barometer. Then a gong rumbled; and every one drifted into the house. Morley remained by the window, watching a tall figure as it advanced at a run from the cedars at the end of the lawn. It was Lady Penelope, with her inseparable dog; but he had no sooner identified her than she turned aside to the stables. At the same moment, his footman returned with a breakfast tray.

"If there's anything you want, sir . . . ," he coughed deferentially.

"Nothing in the world, thanks!," Morley answered with startling fervour.

They were probably complete Philistines, these people. At any moment Aldermaston or Menteith might ask: "*Keats? What* are *Keats?*" They were a likable lot, though; it was a likable house, with a more than likable atmosphere. And in Albany

Terrace, where Henry and his father—"the tired business-men"—raced through a detective story a night, they were less likable without being less complete Philistines.

3

THOUGH he had not before been in a party of quite this kind, Morley decided that there was no need to fear social lapses if he used his eyes and was not in a hurry. The footman had solved the difficulty of the bathroom by collecting his towels and explaining that it was the last door on the right at the end of the passage. And the embarrassment of distinguishing a dozen strangers now first seen by daylight was overcome as they scattered on their own affairs, leaving a message that he would find Lady Silchester digging plantains out of the grass beside an herbaceous border beyond the rock-garden.

"Ah, Mr. Darville! I hope you slept well!," she called out as he came in sight. "I'm so sorry I wasn't up to receive you, but I can't keep late hours as I once did. Have you ever in all your life seen more weeds?"

"It was most awfully kind of you to take me in," said Morley. "I told Mr. Allerdyce he must shoulder the responsibility, but it was entirely my fault that we didn't stop the car in time."

"Your fault, our good fortune," Lady Silchester returned with a smile. Though her glance only rested on him for a moment, he felt that nothing escaped her shrewd grey eyes and that she was accustomed to making up her mind about people

instantly. He felt, too, that nothing would catch her socially unprepared. If she disliked a man's looks or voice, no one would get rid of him more quickly or tactfully. "We country bumpkins don't meet a real live author every day of the week. In fact I believe you're the first we've had here since poor Walter Tokenhouse died. There's quite a look of him about you, by the way . . ."

"You have Mr. Allerdyce," Morley reminded her.

Though he only knew Tokenhouse by reputation, it was a compliment to be likened to him.

Lady Silchester trod down the wounds in the turf from which she had dug the plantains.

"Oh, but I don't count Robin. He's almost one of the family. I never think of him as an author, except when I want him to move stone or pull up groundsel. Then I'm told that he's in the library and I know that means he mustn't be disturbed till the next meal. By the way, he says you can have his car whenever you like to order it, but is it really necessary for you to hurry away?"

Morley heard himself murmuring: "It's frightfully kind of you, Lady Silchester", but he was too much startled to know what he wanted to answer. Was this politeness? Did they keep open house? He could not believe that they were preparing to lionize him as a "real live author"; and, though he felt that he had made a good impression overnight, he could not persuade himself that the conversation at breakfast had followed the lines which his imagination was so fond of tracing. "*A charming boy . . . One of the coming men, according to Robin . . . You must make him stay, mummie! . . . Knowledgeable*

about racin', *for a writer-chap* . . ." This was hopelessly unconvincing! And yet . . .

"My husband would have asked you last night, but he assumed you were going to stay with friends," Lady Silchester explained. "Now that Robin tells us you're only retiring somewhere to work . . . I'm afraid we've a Primrose League gathering this afternoon; but, apart from that, this is the quietest place in England. You fish?"

Morley shook his head:

"I'm afraid I have a rooted objection to killing sports."

For a moment he had been tempted to accept this invitation, but the mention of fishing was a salutary reminder of the gulf that separated him from these people. Whether it was politics with Aldermaston or agriculture with his host, Morley knew that he would be outside the circle of their interests. If he recorded perpetual protests, they would think him a crank and a bore; if he pretended to agree, he would be untrue to himself.

"I don't mind that sort of thing for other people," he added with belated caution.

On his way to the garden he had passed the open door of a murderously well-equipped gun-room.

"You play lawn-tennis?," Lady Silchester asked. "No? Well, I suppose, like Robin, you have very little time. I confess," she continued, as though she were still determined to make the best of him, "I think games are overdone. If I dared, I should like to tell these people to-day that what's wrong with the country is *laziness*. I suppose you wouldn't care to say a few words? You'll be very unpopular!"

Morley laughed and shook his head:

"I should be unpopular with the Primrose League whatever my text. As a rich 'pink', if not an absolute 'red' . . ."

"They tell me that's all the fashion nowadays," Lady Silchester answered complacently. "That book of Bernard Shaw's . . . *I* believe he'll regret it bitterly. He's no longer a young man; he's always been in a tiny minority, proving all the rest of us wrong. Well, now he's convinced us that communism, which I was brought up to regard as the sin of witchcraft, is a matter of degree and that we're all of us more or less communists. He's in a majority! He must go on to something more advanced, just to put us in the wrong again! And, as I say, he's not a young man. Ah, here's Penelope! Darling, I'm trying to persuade Mr. Darville that there's no need for him to rush away. He's making the most ingenious excuses . . ."

As he turned to say good-morning, the first thing Morley observed was that the bull-pup had been discarded as a neckwrap; and he wondered why any one ever allowed so charming a face to be even half-hidden. The little mouth was adorable. So was the small, pointed chin. So was the long, slender neck.

"But why does he want to make excuses?," Penelope asked, turning her grave eyes full on him. "Doesn't he like us?"

"I should love to stay," Morley answered, "but it's absolutely impossible. For one thing, I've no clothes."

"You can send for some. And the men of the party ought to be able to fit you out till they come.

If you want to work, Robin will bear me out that we're absolutely fair over that. Say when you don't want to be disturbed and you won't be disturbed. Robin's like a bank-clerk, or rather more so. Three hours in the morning; another three before dinner. He *says* it's necessary to be perfectly regular, but then I always feel that Robin likes to take all the romance out of authorship. Don't you agree?"

"As I only met him yesterday for the first time . . . ," Morley began.

"That's quite long enough!," Penelope sighed. "He destroyed all my illusions about him in five minutes. I was *thrilled* at the idea of meeting a famous author!" She laughed reminiscently. "I'd always thought, I still think—in spite of him—that it must be the *most* fascinating, *most* wonderful life in the world, a writer's. Isn't it? But you shall tell me that when we've settled the clothes problem."

4

As they walked towards the terrace, Morley smiled to himself at the speed and certainty with which Penelope had decided that he was going to stay. It was said—mostly by people like Allerdyce, of the "blood-will-tell" school—that breeding manifested itself in the habit of being obeyed; certainly this girl, for all her soft graciousness, gave the impression of being used to issuing orders. She was resolved, putting it at its highest, to squeeze what emotion she could from the experience of having

what her mother half-teasingly called "a real live author" in the house. At its lowest, she was going to use him as a stick on Allerdyce's bent and cynical back. Well, if it amused her . . .

And yet—he reflected—these people, surely, could get to know every writer in the country. There was no need to treat as a prophet some one whose name was almost unknown outside a tiny circle of "highbrows". Perhaps it was the highbrow touch . . .

"Penelope has literary aspirations herself," said Lady Silchester.

"Which no one treats seriously," the girl made haste to add. "I least of all. If you're not careful, mummie, you'll make Mr. Darville think I want him to read something I've written. I know better than to do that."

As she turned with a quick smile of reassurance, Morley was amused to observe how the inbred habit of command seemed, with Penelope, to stop at the mouth and eyes without reaching the brain. This tall reed of a girl with the searching grey eyes and imperious manner was entirely confident, in a colloquialism which they would none of them dream of using, that what she said would "go"; she seemed less confident that what she thought would even stand. The discovery set them on a rough equality. Morley knew that, as these people understood the word, he was without "breeding". He lacked the habit of command, he obeyed other people's orders; or, if he resisted, it was with the desperate resolution of a man going to the stake for his convictions; but his belief in his own intellectual surefootedness was more than a match for her inborn

assurance. Without that, a man could make no headway against other people's ancestors. One need not, indeed, be a Disraeli to say "*Though I sit down now, the time will come when you will hear me*": this confidence in one's own rightness was the ultimate weapon of every humblest revolutionary in art and thought.

"I expect you really know far more about writers and writing than I do," said Morley. "As Mr. Allerdyce can tell you, I'm a hired assassin by trade and only a novelist in my spare time. He must know all the big guns . . ."

"But he never talks about them," Penelope broke in impatiently. "If you ask him what Wells and Arnold Bennett are like, he either says that they're 'first-rate fellows' or that he's only met them at a public dinner. If I like a book, I want to know something about the man who's written it. Of course, Robin says I should be disappointed: an author's job is to do his work and not talk about it or allow other people to gush over it . . . I don't agree. I think it's so marvellous to create anything—and so *hard!*—that I want to know how it's done. I think we've a right to know. You're not conjurers, who would starve the moment you'd shewn us how to produce rabbits from hats. Here's a work of art you've invited us to admire . . ."

"I don't think Mr. Allerdyce would allow that phrase," Morley broke in. "If not conjurers, we're public entertainers. He said so last night."

Penelope laughed and then put a finger quickly to her lips, pointing with the other hand to an

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open window where Allerdyce's head—in a nimbus of tobacco-smoke—was bent over a table.

"That's just the sort of thing Robin *would* say," she whispered. "Come away, mummie, or we shall disturb him. . . . Robin believes he has a mission to bring people down to earth. When you talk to him, though he has in some ways had a more wonderful life than any of my other friends: extremes and contrasts, failure, success . . . You must have, too, Mr. Darville, surely?"

Though the last word gave her statement the appearance of a question, Morley felt that she was challenging him to say whether he was a mystery-monger. Probably she had pumped Allerdyce at breakfast; and he, knowing no better, had handed on those faintly misleading confidences of the night before about family opposition and early struggles.

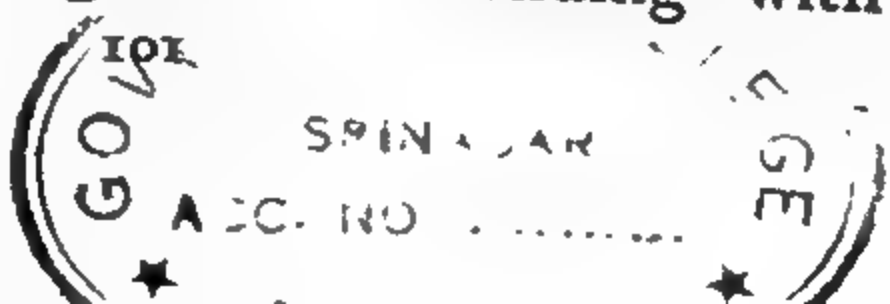
"I've had the failure all right. I suppose I *could* keep from starving if my father got tired of supporting me . . ."

Lady Silchester pointed her stick in the direction of a garden seat. The action, Morley felt, had all the effect of a tactful rebuke, as though Penelope was probing—or he answering—too freely.

"This child finds it quiet here," she explained. "Anything to be taken behind the scenes . . ."

"Robin says there are no scenes worth getting behind and that 'literary society' is a journalistic invention. Do you agree?," Penelope asked.

"I certainly don't." Morley described his last night in Elm Park Gardens, beginning with a list of the better-known guests and ending with a



discreet abridgement of the parody-novel on which he was supposed to be engaged at this moment. "If that's what you mean, it's going on all the time."

"I know it! Robin *is* really rather a pig. Mr. Darville, will you take me to a party of that kind some time?"

Morley turned away and lighted a cigarette, trying to picture the expression of Dora and the young Tidmans if he ever did anything so foolhardy. Penelope and he would probably be coming on after a theatre, she very fresh and regal until the fog of cheap cigarette-smoke caught her by the throat. He could not imagine her sitting on the floor and arguing hoarsely whether the Marquis de Sade was not a maligned figure inasmuch as he honestly enjoyed cruelty for its own sake instead of mixing it up with religion or morals or sport. A recent discussion on this theme had moved Isabel Tidman to such eloquence that the most seasoned of the guests left early.

"I wonder whether you'd like it," he murmured. "It's . . . what people call Bohemian. Perhaps that's why Allerdyce avoids it. Clothes, voices, opinions that you'd consider odd and rather irritating . . ."

"How d'you know that?," Penelope interrupted.

"I'm quite sure they wouldn't be what you're used to." He contrasted the noise and squalor of the Tidmans' house with the repose of Silham. What would the dignified and fragrant creature in the exquisitely pressed blouse and skirt think of that scene in Elizabeth Tidman's bedroom,

with its reek of cheap scent, its mess of disordered clothes and tangle of half-naked bodies? What would she think of Dora? "I've had some years to get acclimatized . . ."

"Isn't it possible that I might like it just because it's different from anything I know?"

Morley shrugged his shoulders and brought the conversation back to the subject of his clothes. He, certainly, had no intention of taking this young woman to "literary" restaurants and "Bohemian" parties. She might be shocked, she would probably be bored. Allerdyce, who should know, complained that she expected to find some wonderful new world "beyond the next range", but she would not find it in Elm Park Gardens.

"If I *am* going to stay here—it's most charming of you to ask me—," he told Lady Silchester, "I really ought to send a message to my people."

"I'll shew you where you can write," she answered, as though she had never been in doubt of his decision. "We must leave the library to Robin, but you'll find everything you want in my husband's room."

5

As he followed her to the house, Morley experimented with phrases for a letter which he knew would be one of the hardest that he had ever been required to write. How to avoid saying too much

or too little for that most difficult audience in Albany Terrace?

"If I let out who I'm staying with, poor mother will make such a song and dance about it," he grumbled. "As though I'd been commanded to Windsor . . . If I don't say now, it will come out sooner or later; and that'll be much worse. They'll think I'm taking it as a matter of course. Whenever I go away, Rose will try to be funny by asking if it's Chatsworth or Haddon Hall this time . . ."

Morley rather wished that they could see this house, these people. The film conception of the English nobility would crumble very soon if this Silham party was fairly representative. There were no gilt coronets stamped on the chairs, no suits of mail nor tattered flags in the hall, no blaze of family diamonds.

The frame was slightly different, but the figures inside it were very like those one would meet in any house. Here, in his host's shabbily comfortable work-room, Archie Menteith had his nose buried in *Racing Up To Date;* Trott, whose pale face and sombre clothes made him look more like a Methodist parson than a member of parliament, was thoughtfully annotating a pamphlet; and Aldermaston, the youngest and chubbiest of the three, was reading *The Times*. They grunted a "good-morning" as Morley came in, then returned to their tasks. So, on Sundays in Albany Terrace, his father might be found reading the *Observer*, while Henry made marginal notes in *Wisden* and Morley himself studied a brochure on lighting in the theatre. There was little outward difference. . . .

He sat down at an empty writing-table and drew a sheet of paper towards him. At the head it bore a coronet inside a garter. He replaced it and took a telegraph form.

"I'm not going to make my beloved parents think that I'm trying to impress them with the stationery," he determined.

CHAPTER TWO

AN AUDIENCE OF ALL

I

After sending off his telegram, Morley fetched the books which he had brought down to review and carried them to a long chair on the terrace, where he worked until the house-party began to assemble for luncheon.

Something of the kind, he felt, was expected of him. When he sat down at the writing-table in Lord Silchester's room, Aldermaston had at once said: "Look here, if you're going to work, we'll clear out"; and, though he protested that such work as he was likely to do here could as well be done in an underground railway-carriage, this was evidently regarded as good-natured self-depreciation. Purely to put the others at their ease, Morley allowed himself to be segregated behind a stockade of chairs on the terrace.

Such consideration, however excessive, was better than the insensitiveness of his parents, but Morley felt vaguely uneasy at the unexpected deference which every one seemed bent on paying him. What would Allerdyce think if he were tempted to hold forth—on the strength of his three

wretched books—as a literary oracle? And this—thanks to Allerdyce's own perverse refusal to talk "shop"—was what Penelope, the literary aspirant, evidently intended to make him do.

And perhaps not Penelope alone. As Aldermaston indicated a quiet corner, he took occasion to deplore his own preoccupation with politics. "To people who pass their lives among books . . . ," he sighed, leaving his lament unfinished. And Menteith, arriving on tip-toe an hour later to ask if Morley would like to wash his hands before luncheon, enquired ingenuously whether "writer fellers" in general did not have to know the very deuce of a lot about, well, everything.

"I often wish *I'd* been decently educated," he confessed, tugging at his moustache and looking at Morley's books very much as Morley himself looked at his dentist's instruments. "You can't think how difficult it is to find names for animals if you don't know any history or mythology. Case in point! A filly by Satrap out of Queen Mab. Now that would be easy enough for you, I dare say . . ."

They might, Morley had to concede, only be trying to put a stranger at his ease, but it really seemed that the flowing cloak and tasselled cane had their value after all! As he came in from the terrace, Lady Silchester invited his opinion of a *roman à clef* which had been convulsing London for a month.

"There's a quite unmistakable portrait of poor Jane Moorhouse. Such bad taste!," she complained. "And, I should have thought, such bad art."

"What does Mr. Allerdyce say?," Morley asked.

However much they encouraged him, he was not going to thrust himself forward in the hearing of a man who knew precisely what importance to give three unsuccessful novels and a job on a bankrupt review.

"Robin, m'dear sir, never has an opinion on anything!," declared Lord Silchester.

"He despises us all too much to take us into his confidence," said Mrs. Fildes.

"That's why we come to you," added Lady Silchester.

Luncheon was announced before an answer could be given; and, by the time they had taken their seats, half-a-dozen new conversations had sprung up.

Morley found himself at one end of the table, next to his hostess and with Penelope at right angles on his other side. While she prepared a plate of food for her pampered dog, he looked round the table, guessing at the age of her brother and sister and trying to explain thereby her odd points of difference from them. What was it her mother had said about always wanting to get behind the scenes? If "the child" was five- or six-and-twenty, she must have been born a year or two after the South African war, about the time that Aldermaston was making ready for Eton; and she could hardly have left the school-room when Lady Agnes

married. She had therefore been thrown on a world that was trying to recover its balance after the last war. And perhaps, like himself, she had grown up alone. . . .

"Have you done a good morning's work?," she enquired. "It's quiet here. So quiet that, if you stay more than a few days, you'll find yourself covered with moss. We're a hundred miles from London and more than a hundred years from the twentieth century."

"But you have all sorts of people to stay, don't you?," Morley asked. "And you go away to see your friends?"

"Yes, but that's always the same thing under a different name." The grey eyes swept the table; and her voice sank confidentially. "You don't have a feeling of . . . unreality here? When I stay with Sir Victor in Lanarkshire, I think only of coal and iron and whether a ship's going to be built on the Clyde or the Tyne. Our generation wants to get at the *facts* of life . . . ," she summarized her grievance.

"Is that why you're so indignant with Allerdyce," Morley asked, "for telling you that in his job there are no definite facts to get at?"

Penelope frowned impatiently:

"I think he's just tiresome about that. There's a theatrical world and a political world and an industrial world. There must be a literary world, too. You told me so this morning."

Morley nodded thoughtfully. He was conscious of a budding sympathy with Allerdyce.

"I'm afraid anything we could shew you would be a disappointment," he warned her. "You'd

find the company—as I warned you—rather mixed, for one thing . . ."

"You mean I should find some men who'd not been at a public school and a university?," she enquired. "Mr. Darville, I thought that sort of thing was *absolutely* out of date!"

"The social passport?"

Morley smiled to think of his own arrival the night before. Robin Allerdyce, in his friendly, casual way, had catalogued the Silham collection for the guidance of an alien, without seeming to remember that any one not an alien would have known all about "old Archie Mentieth" (the Galloway Menteiths, seventeenth Lancers, all that sort of thing) and "little Elsie Fildes" (who was a Raineham, of course). Morley dared swear that his host had not been so casual in admitting the alien. A man who strayed from his natural background had to be "placed"; and in those few minutes when Allerdyce hurried indoors to prepare the way a raised eyebrow had asked whether this Darville's papers were in order, a nod had answered that they were.

"I should have thought the only thing people took seriously nowadays was not being bored," said Penelope. "Does anybody still ask if a person is 'all right to know'?"

"I should have said the caste-spirit was as strong as it had ever been."

"And a nincompoop who's done nothing but inherit a handle to his name still thinks himself superior to men like H. G. Wells and J. H. Thomas?"

"He never thinks at all," Morley laughed.

"You can divide society into those who are sure of themselves and those who aren't. And in some odd way," he added reflectively, "the people who are sure of themselves resist all invasions and survive all revolutions. The guillotine did far more damage to those who used it than to those who died by it; and the people who destroyed aristocracy in Russia were not the bolshevists, but the aristocrats who ran away."

Penelope's big eyes searched her neighbour's face to make sure that he was not amusing himself with paradoxes.

"But caste, as you call it, is the refuge of those who have nothing else to offer!," she protested.

"As the Duke of Plaza-Toro shewed when he turned himself into a limited company."

"Put your nincompoop in competition with any man of talent, though . . ."

"The men of talent are seldom fully extended," Morley interrupted. "They've been infected with caste-ideas. Instead of sticking to their jobs, you find writers and painters—people who should know better!—struggling into the Enclosure at Ascot or strutting about a royal garden-party. Deserting to the enemy, in other words. Admitting that there's something in the caste business after all."

Penelope sat without speaking until her mother reminded her that she was keeping every one waiting.

"Won't you go on, mummie?," she asked. "Well, Mr. Darville, you depress me. Do you *really* think that everybody's such a snob . . .?"

Her vehemence moved Morley to smile:

"Some people would tell you that snobbishness is the strength of the race. There are no revolu-

tions in a country where the knight wants to be a baronet and the baronet a peer. It supplies an invigorating stimulus all round, beginning with the errand-boy who hopes to become a knight. It may seem vulgar to ape your 'betters'; but, if more display means harder work, there's something to be said for it."

3

As Penelope seemed to have no answer ready, Morley took the opportunity of looking about him for the first time since the beginning of the meal. Lady Silchester was deep in conversation with Sir Victor about bee-keeping, cross-fertilization and Isle of Wight disease. Every one else seemed to be listening, of choice or necessity, to Menteith's examination of Derby prospects.

The dining-room, which had evidently been left for the decorating genius of the Adam brothers, was panelled in sparrow's-egg blue, with tall mahogany doors. The chairs and table, Morley supposed, must be genuine Sheraton; and all this silver, so delicate and so exquisitely polished, was of the period. Of the pictures, one looked like a Gainsborough and another a Lawrence; and in all the scene nothing but the lighting and the dress and the fashion of manner and speech had changed for a hundred and fifty years.

Would it, he wondered, ever change? The statuesque and silent girl opposite him was apparently designed for Aldermaston. In time they would succeed and have an heir of their own. A

new generation of sportsmen, politicians, authors and business men would pass across the stage, sitting on the same chairs and handling these same thin spoons. Perhaps there would be a daughter as well as a son; maybe the luncheon-parties of thirty years hence would be faintly perturbed by rebellious whispers that it was all "unreal". . . .

Penelope was very charming, Morley decided, with her vehemence, her perplexity and her wistfulness; she was also very raw. As a companion picture, he visualized the dining-room in Albany Terrace at this moment. She would not find the domestic life of his "caste" any more amusing than her own if she explored—as she must—the literary world in its entirety. Writers did not spend all their time creating masterpieces or discussing style at the Café Royal. They had illness and servant-trouble, like other people; their worries were no more ennobling; their circumstances, generally, were less consoling. Intellectually sterile these "illiterate barbarians"—as Menteith called them—might be, living on their undwindling humps of inherited self-satisfaction (which was a frank paraphrase for "being sure of oneself"); at any rate their surroundings were pleasant. Morley's own efforts to fill the converted nursery at home with a print here and a piece of Queen Anne walnut there must seem rather pathetic to any one who was born to Sheraton and brought up between Lawrence and Gainsborough. . . .

No, "unreal" was the last word that Penelope should have used for the atmosphere of this place! If at first the mellow peace seemed almost theatrical, as though Mr. Basil Dean had chosen Georgian

furniture for a Georgian set and coached his company until they harmonized with the pictures and the silver, one discovered very soon—Morley felt—that it had a definitely tranquillizing power over ragged nerves. Here was he, completely at ease with people who shared none of his opinions or interests. Captain Menteith was at this moment expounding the merits of a new starting-gate; and Mr. Trott was being lucid about the late government's derating policy. A week ago Morley would have flung from the room, muttering: "*In my hell, conversation will be restricted to racing and politics!*" Now . . .

Actually, he now discovered himself trying to catch Allerdyce's eye, to let him know that he was grateful for the chance that had brought him here. To remember that he had ever promised himself the fellow's head on a charger was now merely laughable. The peace was real enough, almost tangible. They assumed that life would run smoothly, instead of asking themselves eternally whether the servants would give notice.

And their friendliness was real! As they went out to the terrace for coffee, Lady Silchester asked if Morley had written his letter. She was not going to let him off; so, if he had been thinking of fresh excuses, he must keep them for some one else.

"I sent a telegram," he told her. "If you really think you can put up with me till Tuesday . . ."

"Oh, but I hope you'll stay much longer than that! It's on record, you know, that Mr. Gibbon came here for a week and stayed six months."

"Apart from other differences," Morley laughed, "Gibbon was not a dramatic critic. As soon as Whitsuntide's over, there's a whole crop of new plays coming on . . ."

"Well, stay as long as you can. I can hardly remember a more perfect May. I wonder," she continued, "if I should *like* your work. To see *everything* in *every* theatre . . . Robin did that for a time, before he made it up with his father, you know. And he *hated* it! Does every author have to quarrel with his relations, by the way? I gather your parents had other ideas for you . . ."

Morley took his coffee and seated himself on the balustrade of the terrace, at right-angles to her chair.

"Mustn't all children stand up to all parents," he asked, "if the world is not to remain stationary? This was really only a polite disagreement, I should tell you: I wasn't turned out of the house or cut off with a shilling. In a way I'm rather sorry that the fine, ferocious old custom of disinheriting your children is dying out."

"You think parents should stand up to their children sometimes? I see you're determined to be fair all round, but I'm afraid family life would become rather a free fight."

Morley was tempted to say that this depended chiefly on the parents. During his few hours in this house he had heard Aldermaston and Penelope chaffing their father in a way that would have been impossible for Rose or Henry to imitate.

"If you had to break with your family before you followed what seemed your vocation," he answered, "it would shew you were in earnest.

With luck, the world would be rather less glutted with talented amateurs."

"You don't think parents should make friends of their children?"

"I doubt if it's possible. Different generations are bound to represent different ideas; and nothing's worth having if you're not prepared to fight for it. You mentioned Gibbon a moment ago. Can you respect a man who sighs as a lover and obeys as a son? If a girl wasn't ready to defy her parents for me, I shouldn't think she cared much for me."

Lady Silchester pursed her lips, as though she did not want a second revolutionary in the house. They relaxed to their customary smile when she saw that Penelope was engrossed in conversation with her brother.

"I wonder if you'll think that when you have children of your own," she murmured.

"I hope so! Even if this clash of ideas made social intercourse rather difficult. That, by the way, was my sole reason for hesitating when you so kindly asked me to stay. I knew I should have to avoid every kind of controversy . . ."

"Are you so heterodox? Or are we?"

"Isn't it least invidious to say that we're speaking different dialects of the same language? North of the Trent it's orthodox to pronounce the a of France like that of ancestor; in the south it's an oddity."

Lady Silchester smiled as though at least the tone of the answer pleased her. In their common language, Morley felt she was saying, there was a common decalogue which she was glad to see him obeying, even though it was this code which made

Penelope exclaim that he would grow moss if he remained long at Silham Park. One edged away from contention, in the Silchesters' urbane world. Atheist and ultramontane, Tory and Communist bobbed about like air-balloons, never getting to grips. It could never be necessary to say here, as in Albany Terrace: "*The Lewises are dining to-night. Remember to keep off Jews.*"

A draught-proof, sound-proof existence, blunting to the edge of one's mind. Small wonder if there was a feeling of cotton-wool about the work of a man like Allerdyce, who passed his days in this atmosphere.

Morley turned away to put down his coffee-cup and turned back to find Lady Silchester watching him as though she would like to ask what in this easiest of easy houses compelled him to put a curb on himself.

"I should have thought all civilized people spoke very much the same dialect," she propounded. "I certainly seem to have found that in my travels."

"I should agree if I thought we used the same definition for 'civilized people'," Morley answered.

Her travels, he surmised, had taken her to a hundred places that were in essence the same as this. The great English country-house. Could she imagine a civilization that did not run on oiled wheels or one that lacked the best of everything always and everywhere? At luncheon she had played

with food which would permanently disincline him for the fare of Albany Terrace; she had sipped and left wine which he would gladly have finished for her. If she or her innocent daughter could see how a working journalist or a struggling author lived! And some might say that *they* were the true apostles of civilization . . .

Perhaps, by the way, it was well that his conversation with Penelope had left him so often with a full glass and untouched plate! The white-wine was insidious and strong; he was not in the habit of drinking madeira at luncheon; and now he had allowed the butler to give him brandy with his coffee. The effect was to make him feel that he was enjoying a success, but he could not be sure of feeling this when the present stimulus had passed off. It was safer to resist all efforts to make the "real, live author" talk. . . .

"What time does the Primrose League muster?," he asked, as a procession of gardeners began to arrange seats and chairs in a horse-shoe round a flag-bedecked platform on the far side of the lawn.

Aldermaston stifled a yawn as though the mere thought of politics made him drowsy.

"My oration," he answered, "is at four. I give you good notice so that you can escape."

"But I should like to hear it," Morley answered.

"Oh, come! It's my job to make a certain number of speeches and listen to a great many more, but why any one who's not obliged to read or hear anything but the absolute best . . . You know, I envy you writers, Darville! You can pick and choose so. Your stock-in-trade is a pen and a

sheet of paper; you can work when you like, where you like; all's grist that comes to your mill . . ."

Morley became uncomfortably conscious that he was being given a cue. The other conversations had died away; and Penelope was looking up as though she expected at last to hear described that "literary world" of which Robin Allerdyce always denied the existence. Fortunately, before the desire to be brilliant prevailed over the resolution to be modest, he caught sight of Allerdyce and contented himself with replying:

"I'm not in any hurry to change places."

"I should think not!" It was the usually taciturn Mr. Trott who now tried to tempt him. "The most you can hope for in politics is that, when you die, your name will be associated with some measure that hundreds of other people have helped to mould. There's no concrete thing of which you can say: '*This is the* Pickwick Papers. *A work of art. My own absolutely. I loved writing it. I've made money from it. And, when I'm dead and buried, it will remain behind*' . . ."

The halting voice died away; and Morley was startled to find Captain Menteith preparing his contribution:

"I couldn't write a book if I tried for a month of Sundays, but I *should* like to know what started you in the first place. 'Mean to say, it's a rum thing to set out in cold blood . . ."

"If you set out in cold blood," Morley interrupted, "I don't suppose you'd ever get to the end of your journey."

"But what gives you the impulse?," enquired Sir Victor Winton.

Morley had a stock answer for such questions, but he was checked from delivering it by the discovery that, though he had seated himself on the balustrade to be near Lady Silchester, he was in fact perched above the company as though he were delivering a lecture. And the others had turned their chairs towards him. In London, he was wont to complain, no one ever listened to him except, occasionally, Dora; here . . . But he must not forget his resolution.

"Oughtn't you to put that question to Allerdyce, sir?," he asked. "I'm only a humble beginner."

"Robin will only talk about the law of supply and demand," Lord Silchester answered.

A footman came out to collect the coffee-cups; and Morley seized the occasion to escape from his too-commanding throne. Never should it be said that he had talked every one's head off! Never should it be thought—as he himself was only too prone to think of his relations—that the tyro might profitably forbear to dogmatize in the presence of the expert.

He reaped his reward in the moment that the heads of his audience swung slowly away from him and Allerdyce shuffled forward to knock his pipe out.

"Pray silence for Marc Antony!," cried Penelope. "He is no orator, as Darville is, But, as you know him well, a plain, blunt man That loves his work . . . The callow Darville hints That Shakespeare's not the same as Henry Ford. If this be so, it is a grievous fault. And grievously shall Shakespeare answer it. Supply, demand:

what the brute public wants . . . Go on, Robin!"

Allerdyce looked down at her with an expression that made his careworn face almost beautiful. Tenderness, pride, adoration . . . No single word explained his transfiguration.

"I honestly don't know what more any one can say," he defended himself with his customary diffidence. "I should maintain that in the long nights before the dawn of history primitive man was clamouring to be told stories. Then, as now, he wanted to be taken out of himself. Then, as now, he wanted to be amused, thrilled, exalted, baffled; he wanted to enjoy vicariously all the glory and good fortune which he despaired of enjoying in his own person. Well, there's your constant demand. Most naturally, it called into existence a constant supply of story-tellers. And, so far as I can see, that's all there is to it."

As he paused to relight his pipe, Sir Victor murmured:

"Robin, you're hopeless!"

"Because I don't talk romantic nonsense about 'divine sparks' and 'uncontrollable urges'?," asked Allerdyce. "My dear Victor, the spark would very soon be quenched if there were no market for us to supply. There's still a good deal of cant talked—not so much, thank God, as in the 'art-for-art's-sake' days—, but nobody writes a line or composes a bar or paints a head or models a bust except to supply a demand. The impulse that sets him in motion is a belief that he can turn out just as good an article as the other fellow, perhaps a better one. Supply and demand! Some

people are more conscientious than others, but your Stevensons and Conrads never wrote from sheer love of self-expression, they never filled cupboards with the books they'd written for their private satisfaction . . ."

"'*Preach the gospel and avoid enthusiasm*'," Lord Silchester quoted.

Allerdyce laughed and went back to his chair:

"I'm sorry if you think I'm keeping you out of some secret, Silchy, but I hold my peace about the so-called mysteries of authorship because I believe they're an elaborate sham invented by the laity and fostered, I'm sorry to say, by people who ought to know better than to stretch themselves out like cats for their stomachs to be tickled. You may think it's unkind to discourage the curiosity of the public . . ."

5

As he stopped, on a note of interrogation, Morley stared at the end of his cigar, wondering if he could trust himself to speak without shattering Lady Silchester's belief that the language of "civilized" society was everywhere the same and that no word spoken in such a house as this could cause a man to bite his lips for fear of losing control of himself. The creed which Allerdyce professed was that of a sausage-maker; and the only fit comment was that it adequately explained the quality both of Allerdyce's success and of his work.

Meanwhile, Penelope's serious grey eyes were upon him.

"Do you agree with Robin?," she asked.

"It's . . . a point of view," Morley answered.

"But do you share it?," she persisted.

Morley flung away the end of his cigar and, with it, the muzzle which he had been wearing ever since the beginning of luncheon, perhaps ever since old Uncle thrust him into Allerdyce's car overnight.

"I don't think art can be discussed in terms of political economy," he answered. "Supply and demand . . . If I remember the nonsense they tried to teach me at Cambridge, the economists invented a fantastic creature called 'the economic man', who existed to create wealth and follow his own material interests blindly and fit in to various theories of rent and population. Well, I leave the politicians and industrialists to say whether they govern and organize with their eyes on this imaginary creature, but he's not enough to explain the artistic impulse. I can think of men and women—young and foolish, perhaps, and certainly 'uneconomic'—who turn their backs on comfortable homes and lucrative jobs, to live on next to nothing and give the whole of themselves to their job . . ." He looked across to Allerdyce in challenge. "Is it too highly 'romantic' to call that the job of attaining perfection in creating a beautiful thing? These people I have in mind don't want big houses and expensive cars, they care nothing about rich food and wonderful clothes; and so, if there were a 'demand' to write sentimental balderdash for the screen, they simply

wouldn't 'supply' it. Very 'uneconomic', of course, but they want to do something that they and the people like them can approve. They wouldn't go into what's called 'society' if you paid them!" Morley glanced at Menteith, then at Winton and then at Aldermaston. He was holding his audience so well that he could afford to speak plainly. "They can't spare time for sport, or business, or politics. Their interests are different. They're really a race apart, like any other fanatics, with standards and ideals and rewards of their own . . ."

He stopped abruptly. This was getting perilously near what Allerdyce called the "art-for-art's-sake cant" of the nineties. An uneasy silence followed; and Lady Silchester made a movement to rise.

Allerdyce sprang forward and offered her his hand.

"And these people you speak of," he asked, turning to Morley, "you think they'd still be content to go on writing perfectly, even if they never got a publisher? My reason for asking is that I've always found the art-for-art's-sake people quite the most shameless log-rollers and back-scratchers in all our dismal fraternity."

Morley was careful not to answer until he had mastered his anger.

"Why do you call it a 'dismal' fraternity?," he asked. "You speak as though you were ashamed of your calling."

"I'm ashamed of the cant that's talked about it," Allerdyce answered wearily. "The calling itself I adore. I should go on writing even if

nobody read me. I love telling stories. I have nearly a dozen books which will never be published, simply because the book-sellers won't take more than two a year from me. And I should think I'm the only man in England of whom that could be said."

CHAPTER THREE

THE REWARD OF FAITH

I

When the rest of the party moved to their places in the horse-shoe round the platform, Morley escaped to his room and stood at the window looking down with dismay on the scene which had enchanted him only that morning.

"And I'm tied here till Tuesday at earliest!," he muttered.

Fool, conceited fool that he had been to accept Lady Silchester's invitation! Because her hospitality was greater than her prudence, he had imagined that he was really wanted and would be able to fit in with people who spoke not a different dialect but a different language! He should have been warned overnight that he had no place among those who shot and fished and bred prize cattle and made political speeches to the end that England might be rendered safe for those who shot and fished and bred prize cattle . . . In his arrogance, Morley had imagined that these facetiously self-styled "illiterate barbarians" were intrigued at meeting some one with a different range of interests and scale of values. Then Allerdyce must needs rush in to explain that the art of which

a girl like Penelope spoke with so much ignorant reverence was a commodity like any other.

"And I must needs lose my temper and be most infernally rude . . ."

Morley wondered whether Lady Silchester was saying at this moment: "*And we can't get rid of him till Tuesday at earliest!*" Were the other members of his lately deferential audience agreeing that they had noticed something odd from the first and that a man who grew incipient side-whiskers and wore comic clothes would sooner or later reveal a cloven hoof?

With a gesture of defiance Morley picked up his wide-brimmed black hat and made his way to the garden. As he strode away from the house, a voice hailed him; and to his consternation he saw Penelope leaving Allerdyce's side and crossing the lawn to meet him. What had they been saying?

"Then you're not going to listen to the speeches after all?," she asked.

He shook his head, smiling uneasily:

"Politics, even when the speaker's on my side, rouse me to such a *fury* of contentiousness! And I've already argued enough to justify Lady Silchester in ordering my things to be packed and sent to the station."

"Instead of which," Penelope laughed, "she's asked me to arrange about meeting the train. Did you tell Crumlin to have a car ready? Well, let's give the order in the stables. And then, if you're feeling energetic, you can help me take Stanley for his walk. I don't think you said a word too much, Mr. Darville . . ."

"I can't stand Allerdyce's machine-made conception of art," Morley broke in. "A certain cynicism may be expected of a man who's produced as much and had as much success; but, in the days when he quarrelled with his people and made a livelihood by reporting, I don't suppose he called it 'cant' to talk about art for its own sake. Now that he's rich and fashionable and confines himself to writing about the rich and fashionable and only stays in rich and fashionable houses . . ." Morley checked at the discovery that he was becoming heated again. "If I said too much, you must remember that I'm a wild man of the Bohemian woods . . ."

Penelope's glance rested for a moment on the suit which he had put on for the Critics dinner overnight.

"With the possible exception of Robin, I can't think of any one *less* Bohemian," she laughed. "When you insisted that you couldn't stay here because you hadn't the right clothes, I felt it might have been Archie or my brother speaking. Will you wait here while I fetch Stanley?"

She disappeared into the stables without giving him time to answer; and Morley was left to decide for himself whether a discreetly flaunted indifference to other people's standards might not, after all, be an asset in this company. The public-school-and-university passport was perhaps a necessary credential for the men of the party; to Lady Silchester, possibly, and to Penelope, quite certainly, a Bohemian *visa* hinted at alluring adventures in countries that were forbidden to them. And for himself it might prove useful in averting

certain embarrassments in an unfamiliar country. Here was this girl fancying that he would naturally tell some one else's butler to arrange for a car to collect his luggage. Now, that might be the "technique" in a house like this, or it might not; but one had to learn by observation and not by thinking how one's father would handle any visitor who gave orders to the servants in Albany Terrace.

It would be a shock to both sides if he introduced Penelope to Regent's Park! Her romantic conception of the literary world . . .

A DOOR slammed; and the bull-pup raced out, bent double with ecstasy at the prospect of a walk.

"You're sure you don't want to work?," Penelope asked, taking off her hat and letting the sun play on the dark ripples of her hair.

"I've nothing serious on hand at the moment," Morley answered. "A few dull-looking books to review . . ." It was tempting to descant on the responsibility and power of a critic; but he would not run the risk of being thought solemn. "Unlike Allerdyce, who seems able to outwrite his publishers . . . ," he continued with a sigh which his companion might ascribe either to envy of such inspiration or regret for so great haste.

"How do you regard Robin's work?," Penelope asked, as they set out. "Is it first-class, second-class, third-class?"

"I suppose he's one of the most *successful* of

our popular novelists," Morley answered guardedly. "How far popularity is a test of merit . . ."

"You mean he may not live?," she interrupted in the clear, assured voice that consorted with her steady gaze and imperious carriage. A crowd, Morley felt, would always make a passage for Penelope. "And yet, unless you're popular in your own life-time, I can't see why you should be popular when you're dead. How do you compare him, though, with other novelists of the same kind?"

Morley walked for twenty yards without answering. The formula about popularity before and after death had a ring of Allerdyce about it. How much of this conversation, he wondered, would be repeated?

"I started with a prejudice," he confessed. "I dislike novels that depend for their success on the number of peers and millionaires and Rolls-Royces and silver-plated cocktail-shakers that they introduce. In fairness to Allerdyce, I think he describes this world because it's the only one he knows; if he amasses a fortune by it, I suppose we can't blame him. So long as he doesn't make the favour of a circulating library his test . . ."

Exasperating as was the public attitude to Allerdyce, his own indifference to criticism was yet more galling.

"I think his only test is time," said Penelope. "In a hundred years the rubbish will sink to the bottom and the good stuff, which people go on wanting to read, will keep afloat."

"Meanwhile, what a heaven on earth for him if all critics went out of business!"

"He thinks they would be the first to benefit. When he was working on the *Examiner*, he used to amuse himself by looking at what had been said about the writers of the mid-Victorian period. He says it was amazing! People whose very names are unknown now were being praised to the skies . . ."

"While Meredith was being torn to pieces and Hardy driven out of novel-writing. I know! His implication is that the critics of the present day are either a thousand times cleverer than their predecessors or else that they're making the same kind of crass blunders. It's an awkward dilemma for us."

The irony in his tone was thinly disguised; but, if Penelope insisted on talking about Allerdyce, she must really be made to see that his disinterested concern for the future reputation of those who ventured to criticize him was unwanted.

"I think he only means that taste, like everything else, is a matter of fashion," she replied. "When tortoise-shell spectacles first came in, every one stared at them; but we've become so used to them now that, as he says, we stare at anything else."

It was on the tip of Morley's tongue to ask whether she had any opinions of her own that were not coloured by Allerdyce. Whether she was quoting him or disowning him, her persistent "Robin says" suggested that she never escaped him.

"I don't know," he substituted, "that you should have asked my views in one breath if you were going to say in the next that no one should

have views on anything less than a century old."

"Oh, I didn't mean that we were to put our judgements in cold storage! So long as we don't become pontifical, like the people who slated Keats and gushed over George Eliot . . . A contemporary opinion on Robin by a fellow-writer would be very interesting. When you've been engaged to a man for a couple of years . . ."

Morley was startled out of the habit, which he had been acquiring for a night and a day, of negligently taking things for granted.

"But are you . . . ?," he began, with an odd feeling of blankness.

"Oh, not now! *He* broke it off, by the way. That's to say, he asked me if I shouldn't like a bit more time before committing myself irrevocably. I hadn't seen a great deal of the world and I was perhaps rather hypnotized by father and mother, who simply adore Robin. Quite rightly! I adore him myself."

"Then *why* . . . *?*"

"He would say: '*Youthful ignorance*'," Penelope laughed. "I'm devoted to him, but I didn't know that I could bear the life he leads."

"I should have thought it would be very like the life you lead now."

"It would have been exactly the same! That's the trouble."

They had made a circuit of the lawn and were walking slowly uphill through the widely spaced avenue of cedars to an eminence commanding the house and the black horse-shoe of political enthusiasts. On the flag-bedecked platform a

foreshortened figure was gesticulating with mild persuasiveness. The less earnest members of the Primrose League sauntered in twos and threes about the gardens. Even this kind of raid in force seemed powerless to ruffle the repose of a house built in the most dignified and secure years of the most calm and balanced century in England's history.

"If I were a girl," said Morley, "I should be so miserable at the thought of leaving a place like this that I should insist on marrying a man who could give me something exactly similar."

"I know that was the old idea," Penelope admitted with a frown. "The whole duty of woman was to be 'suitably provided for'. Nowadays, no! For one thing, we want to find out rather more where the 'suitable provision' comes from. I've had a shock, Mr. Darville: I've been reading a lot of books . . . Upton Sinclair. People like that . . . It may be all propaganda, it may only apply to America. I don't know! What I *do* know is that I'm absolutely ignorant of the way this country is run and of anything that goes on under the surface. Are *we* in the power of the newspapers here? Are the newspapers in the power of Big Business? It would be awful to think that we were keeping up a vast conspiracy of law-and-order, decency, all that sort of thing, just to secure the good things of this world for ourselves. And yet that's what people like us have been doing for heaven knows how long! When children were being worked to death in mines and factories, our elegant, cultured ancestors didn't know or didn't care. They said the country

would be ruined if you made any change. The parsons preached against the wickedness of being discontented. I can't help wondering if very much the same thing isn't going on all the time. If I'd married Robin, though . . ."

"Was that why the engagement was broken off?," Morley felt emboldened to ask.

Penelope shrugged her shoulders:

"In a way. Mercifully for every one I hadn't developed a social conscience in those days, but I felt even then that we were a thousand miles from reality. Girls—according to Robin—had still to be 'protected'! Cotton-wool everywhere! Until you turned on him after luncheon, I believe he'd quite forgotten the people he used to meet twenty years ago. Poor people. Insignificant people. People kept alive, like you, by a white-hot passion for beauty."

3

THEIR path was blocked by a fallen tree; and Penelope sat down, looking ahead of her through a mist of blue-bells. If she had wanted him to see the house and gardens at their loveliest, Morley felt that she could not have led him to a better point. "A high place," he caught himself muttering, "with the kingdom of the worldly spread below." It would have been unkind to dash her enthusiasm, but he could not help wondering how many of her "poor people, insignificant people" would rest content with their "white-hot passion for beauty" if a tempter offered them Silham

house and park as the reward of bowing down and worshipping. He himself . . .

"It would be an interesting education to change places with Allerdyce for six months," he told her.

"You're the last person I should have expected to say *that !*," Penelope exclaimed.

"I wouldn't put a comma in for money, or take one out for what people call 'recognition', but I always feel that the caste Allerdyce belongs to has at least studied the art of living. You're so accustomed to the best, Lady Penelope, that you don't realize what you'd be giving up if you *weren't* 'suitably provided for'." He looked down at the girl's slender legs. "Wouldn't any one prefer silk stockings to the rigid, glistening artificial variety? You've never worn them, so you take real silk for granted . . ."

Automatically she began to look for tears and scratches from the tangled undergrowth through which they had been walking.

"I wear what my maid tells me to wear," she answered. "Which is rather symbolical. When the world is seething with new theories about our duty to God and our neighbour, we placidly wear the ideas that our parents have put out for us! And we hand them on to the next generation. My sister had her three boys baptized as infants for fear of their seeming 'peculiar' when they went to Eton. And it would be inconceivably 'peculiar' if they didn't go to Eton at all! This 'fine art of life' . . . I feel it's like dressing up as a shepherdess and discussing Rousseau when a revolution's breaking out . . ."

Morley threw himself on the grass and began to fill his pipe. In a day or two he would be going back to the petty despotism of his poor, fussy father and to a life where there seemed no room for physical or spiritual elbows. He would have to retire within himself to recall that he had once, for a few hours, eaten exquisite food in a beautiful room, or handled thin old silver, or walked with a young queen on immemorial turf checkered with the inky shadows of giant cedars. Let him make the most of his opportunities before returning to his own place among the professional middle classes!

"As I shall never have Allerdyce's success, there's no use in discussing it," he sighed.

"I see no reason why you shouldn't," said Penelope. "*The Clown's Tragedy* was a big book."

"With a small public. The things that interest me don't interest the circulating libraries."

"The public is interested in everybody and everything, if you describe them well enough." Penelope, unlike Dora, did not tell him that he was lacking in "red blood"; unlike a "Robin-Allerdyce heroine", she did not threaten to haunt his working hours with her "inspiration". "If you can make me feel, long after the book's finished, that the vulgar, adorable, pathetic, disgraceful Mr. Polly is still inventing crackjaw words at the Potwell Inn and getting gradually fatter, gradually balder . . ."

"I should have Wells' success? So would any one with Wells' genius!"

"I put faith higher than genius. Nothing but the best will ever satisfy you. That's your creed.

And I believe it means you'll achieve the best. If only you were a little more in love with your poor fellow-creatures . . . It's great presumption for me to talk like this . . . ," she broke off, colouring vividly.

"I should say that faith was being rewarded," Morley answered. "No one has ever talked to me like this before."

Penelope got up suddenly and whistled for her dog.

"I felt it was time for *somebody* to say *something !*," she answered with an odd tenseness which made him feel that she was speaking between clenched teeth. "We left you to fight single-handed after luncheon, when Robin was in his *most* characteristic, *most* tiresome vein. He doesn't mean to be a wet blanket, poor lamb, but he has such a hatred of gush that he suspects all enthusiasm. I suppose it was *that* more than anything else . . ."

"That set you apart?," Morley prompted her, as she hesitated. "May I speak quite freely? What have you been doing with yourself since the engagement was broken off?"

The question seemed to take Penelope by surprise.

"I don't know that I've been doing anything in particular," she answered. "What *could* I do?"

"Ah, who can say? You seem to feel that your life is artificially sheltered, but aren't you rather waiting for 'reality' to come to you?" Recalling the "novels of frustration", he added resentfully: "Allerdyce, I suppose, is waiting for you to see that nothing *is* coming . . ."

"You really believe that?"

4

THE question, keyed to a note of something like dismay, arrested Morley in mid-sentence. What he really believed, now that he had time to think of it, was that he had been trying to break down Allerdyce's baleful dominion over this girl's mind. Why?

"Well, you talked about your 'youthful ignorance'. I imagine he's waiting for you to say you've been following a mirage."

"I'm afraid he is! When he brought you here last night, I felt sure you were coming as an expert witness . . ."

"A witness?," Morley repeated.

"Yes! To be prosaic and bear out all he'd always said. After luncheon to-day I felt he must be thinking that his witness had got rather out of hand. That deadly, material common-sense of his . . ."

She broke off; and Morley left her silence undisturbed. How Dora and the young Tidmans would be rejoiced if they heard of him playing the soulful artist to a chorus of aristocratic Philistines! And yet this was the part which the aristocratic Philistines were forcing upon him! Ridiculous as he knew it to be, Penelope was weaving a drama round their unpremeditated meeting; and the least romantic of men was being invested with romance. A fitting climax, one might think, to the reception already accorded him by these political, sporting, business and "society" folk! How incredible it would all seem

in a week's time, when he returned to Albany Terrace and waited for his father to unlock the letter-box!

"As I've not been invited to give an expert opinion on mirages," he told her, "I suppose I ought not to volunteer one. At the same time, I can't help feeling that you haven't defined what it is you're looking for."

Penelope, walking a pace in front, had her face hidden; but an uncontrolled movement of her white shoulder-blades warned him that he had struck a wrong note.

"Dear Mr. Darville, if I knew what it was, I shouldn't need to look for it!," she exclaimed. "I can only say generally that I haven't the faintest idea of anything but what my own little circle thinks fit for me to hear. I may be wearing clothes or burning coal that hasn't paid a living wage . . ."

"But have you taken any steps to find out?," Morley persisted. "If you worked in your brother's constituency . . ."

"That's not enough! One would have to break away from all this . . ."

She waved her hand with a gesture as vague as her words, leaving her companion to diagnose a pain which she could not even locate. If she meant to abandon Silham for a career of social usefulness, he felt constrained to think that she would lose more than society would gain; and he was sure that her unconcealed hunger for romance would be unsatisfied. As she herself might have said, there was a fashion in civic duty; and the practice of conducting raids into the life of the

poor belonged to the last decades of the nineteenth century. The young social worker of the present day made a study of economics and learnt to speak at street-corners.

"I really don't know what I can suggest," said Morley. "If you disappeared under an assumed name and tried to earn your living for twelve months, you'd certainly learn a great deal, but it would be a false lesson. You haven't been brought up to that kind of thing, it would be ten thousand times harder for you than for the normal wage-earner."

"It would test our boasted education," said Penelope, "and our still more boasted power of sticking things out. I sometimes feel that everything's made too easy for a favoured few of us. If Robin and I had become engaged in the days when he literally didn't know where the next meal was coming from, I really *could* have helped him. *Now* . . . To give parties for the American admirers who come over with letters of introduction! '*Yes, my husband is hard at work on a new book . . . Yes, he works best in the morning and again before dinner. No, he writes everything with his own hand first of all . . .*' It must be awful to have all your triumphs behind you! While you're still climbing, while life's still a passionate adventure . . ."

She turned to him with shining eyes; and Morley felt his heart missing a beat. She was talking, of course, without thinking; but, if adventure was what she wanted, he could offer it in a way no longer open to Allerdyce with his five-figure income. Her family, to be sure, would

resist with tooth and nail; but, if he began very humbly and if each success that he achieved put him in the position to win back, so to say, the birthright which she had pawned in marrying him . . . No need to fear that everything would be made too easy for them! Ultimately, he presumed, she would not resent even a five-figure income if they had worked for it; and she would have had her fill of realities before he could hope to stand where Allerdyce stood now. It was absurd to daydream in this way! And yet if that sudden light in her eyes meant anything . . .

Perhaps suspecting that her expression had changed, she was now turning away again. She too, maybe, was wondering what her parents would say if she told them that she was throwing in her lot with an obscure journalist. . . . And yet they made no objection to Allerdyce, who had been a journalist of equal obscurity.

"'*To travel hopefully is better than to arrive*'," Morley quoted. "Is that your feeling?"

Penelope weighed the proverb in silence for some moments.

"I want you to arrive in the end," she told him. "'*To travel with faith is to arrive with certainty*'. How do you like that? And, if *you* haven't faith, *I* have."

"If I hadn't, you would give it to me. I admit it's sometimes rather strained. When you've tried for even six years with your heart and soul and mind and strength . . ."

"Ah, but *have* you? I say again that you've been writing with your head and not with your heart. If you drew people because you loved

them—like Shakespeare and Dickens, who loved even their scamps!—, not merely because you were interested in their anatomy . . . There's some one waving. Can you see who it is?"

Morley looked up to find that they were once more in the cedar avenue above the house.

"I should say it's Allerdyce," he answered with an odd sense of deflation.

"Yes, it is! I must apologize for talking about myself so much! I've bored and wearied you . . ."

"He's seen us, I'm afraid," said Morley.

5

"We decided that the Primrose League wouldn't be very exciting," Penelope explained, as soon as Allerdyce came within hail, "so we've been for a walk. Have you been sent out as a search-party?"

"Oh, no!" Allerdyce turned and fell into step. "It was really Mr. Darville I was stalking. It occurred to me that something I said after luncheon might have been expressed rather more happily. You don't imagine, I hope, Darville, that I intended anything personal in speaking about log-rolling. What I had in mind was a little group of people—I'll leave them nameless!—who are undoubtedly, as you suggested, absolutely in earnest, who work for the approval of one another and express a healthy scorn for the poor low-brow public . . ."

"Believing," Morley interrupted combatively, "that a jury of butchers and publicans is not

necessarily the best tribunal for judging art." If Allerdyce wished only to justify himself or to revive this trumpery wrangle, he might have waited till a time when his company was less obviously superfluous. "You have a ghastly warning in America of the lengths to which the great heart of the people may lead you. The standards of film-production are set by the farmers of the middle-west . . ."

"But my grouse," Allerdyce interposed, "with the particular group I have in mind is that they're plaintiff, judge *and* jury. They review one another's masterpieces; and, if you don't worship at their shrines and accept their values, you're in outer darkness. However . . . I only wanted to make quite clear that I wasn't including you in it."

Morley bowed and sought a means of dismissing the subject. It would have been a refreshment of the spirit to ask this spoilt darling of the circulating libraries whether a man was a worse novelist for having studied the theory of novel-writing or a worse critic for having attempted the practice. His immediate task, however, was to get rid of the interloper.

"I've really forgotten what it was you said," he answered. "I seem to remember speaking of a certain literary world which you say categorically doesn't exist. I wonder, with the greatest possible respect, whether your log-rolling coterie isn't just as imaginary. Can it be that we're both a little bit out of touch with what's going on?"

Allerdyce struck impatiently at a bed of nettles beside their path.

"*I* am, quite deliberately!," he exclaimed. "The jealousy and back-biting among the young writers of twenty years ago! The servility and intrigue when there was anything to be gained! And the all-embracing insincerity! If that's literary society, keep out of it, Darville! Do your own work in your own way. Read your press notices if you think they can teach you anything. And, if any high-brow tries to be superior at your expense, send him a copy of Trollope's auto-biography. But I don't know why I should presume to advise you like this!"

Morley did not know, either; and he was infuriated to see Penelope nodding as though she regarded this as counsel for a young writer to lay profitably to heart.

"You model yourself on Trollope?," he asked.

"I wish I had half his power of work! I wish I could write a hundredth part as well! Alas, the only thing we have in common is a lively hatred of literary pretentiousness. . . . Are either of you going to have any tea?"

Penelope glanced at her watch and looked at Morley:

"I should like to walk a bit more," he answered and waited to see whether she would go or stay.

"I suppose I ought to work, but not being a disciple of Trollope . . ."

"I'm glad to say I discovered him before his latest revival," Allerdyce put in, blissfully immune to irony. "Frankly, I think that's a little bit of a stunt."

"I can't admire him as a writer," said Morley. "His ideals and methods of work . . . How-

ever, we aren't likely to agree on that or on literary pretentiousness, as you call it, or on anything else connected with our 'trade'. I don't regard it as a trade, you see . . ."

He paused, less in expectation of an answer than with a sense that his tone and words were insufferably rude. Allerdyce smiled good-humouredly, but turned towards the house without speaking. Morley looked at Penelope, half-fearing a rebuke; but she only said:

"I've forgotten what we were talking about."

Morley looked at the retreating back of his rival. Yes, he must think of Allerdyce in future as a rival!

"So have I. He doesn't mean it, of course, but Allerdyce would get on *my* nerves if I saw much of him . . ."

"Then don't think of him! He's gone," said Penelope.

Her words, to Morley's hearing, had an odd snap of finality. . . .

CHAPTER FOUR

ORTHODOXY AT THE STAKE

I

As they continued their walk, Morley discovered that the coming of Allerdyce had broken some spell which his going made more difficult to recover than if he had remained, unwittingly irritating them into a combination against him. Penelope seemed to have been chilled by the interruption; and Morley, after one or two unsuccessful attempts to set her talking again of men whose careers lay behind or ahead of them, seized the opportunity of her silence to get the last night and day into perspective. Four-and-twenty hours ago he had been packing books and old flannels for a week by himself at Burnham. . . .

"It's odd to think that I'm here purely by accident!," he exclaimed suddenly. "If I'd kept a proper look-out, as I was told . . ."

"I hope you don't regret the accident," said Penelope.

"I certainly don't, but I'm still rather bewildered. Everything has turned out so differently from what I expected . . ."

Less than twenty hours ago he had been trying to fasten a quarrel on Allerdyce. And less than

eighteen hours ago he had marched scornfully into this house with a feeling that he was going to see a futile society and a futile "society novelist" exposed at the same time. In future, he would have to qualify his sweeping judgement that men like Allerdyce evolved the world of their novels from their own heated fancy. He had already discarded his picture of Allerdyce as a promoted gossip-writer. Maybe he would go away with a changed conception of a "Robin-Allerdyce heroine". Penelope was anything but the clinging invertebrate of his imagination.

"It's rather unsettling," she laughed, "to think that nearly all the important things in life are the result of trivial accidents. Father always says that, if he hadn't overslept himself and missed a certain train, he would never have met mother. And then where should I be?"

"And, if *my* parents hadn't both gone to Brighton—from different ends of England—after the same influenza epidemic, I shouldn't be here now."

"It's really very fortunate! I should hate not to have been born. You too?"

"Yes, being alive is an experience not to be missed. Especially on a day like this, in a place like this."

"Then you don't regret that we made you stay? I'm glad! How is it different from what you expected?"

Morley shook his head and begged for time to consider his answer. He had not expected, even so lately as that morning, that Penelope would be interested in him apart from his books;

and he did not yet know whether she was waking to a romantic concern for an unrecognized genius or taking her turn in looking after an unaccommodating guest. In his first reaction from the day-dreams in which he had indulged half-an-hour earlier, Morley took a savage delight in biting on unpalatable facts. How absurd these dreams were! Briefly and bluntly, he was out of his natural element in this kind of house and society; and they had encouraged him to talk of his own subject because he knew no other. Allerdyce, secretly smarting under criticism of "upper-ten novelists", might have thought it very clever to plant him here; but—Morley warmed to combativeness—this punctual chronicler of a sterile and vacuous "high life", before he set out to make converts, might profitably consider whether he was himself in danger of being converted. The Philistines, of all people the least entitled to take themselves for granted, had been shewn that there was something to say for intellect.

"I always feel we're so desolatingly average," Penelope complained.

"And *I* feel—I *know*—that I've never met any one like you before!," Morley answered, without giving himself time to be cautious.

"That's only because you're too busy to waste time in the places where my doubles and I congregate," she answered, as though she had not heard any change in his tone. "I'm honestly appalled at a thing like a hunt-ball. There are so many of us, all using the same patter. I'm not in the least surprised when the men can't identify their partners . . ."

"I don't imagine that happens to you often!"

"It would, if I hadn't been marked as a person to avoid! I'm afraid I frighten away the ordinary young man with the pink coat and the pink cheeks and the pink, new-born baby's mind. One gets such a hunger, sometimes, for intelligent conversation. . . . Do you think we ought to be going back? I shall get into trouble if I monopolize you."

2

Morley turned reluctantly; and they made their way slowly down to the lawn. He was conscious of faint apprehension at the near prospect of meeting the rest of the party. If, among his own people, a strange man had disappeared for the entire afternoon with his sister, the family would have been agog with curiosity and Rose would have exhibited acute self-consciousness.

Here it would seem that, if any one was interested, the interest—like every other emotion—had to be concealed. No one, when they joined a languid group on the terrace, asked where they had been; and, when Allerdyce came out of the library and helped himself to a whiskey-and-soda, his manner to Penelope was unruffled and to Morley cordial. Like everything else, this was taken for granted. . . .

"Though, as a matter of fact," Morley corrected himself, "they cease to take things for granted if you stand up to them. When I told Lady Silchester I didn't play tennis, she gave me quite a good mark."

He collected another good mark, this time from his host, for refusing whiskey and asking for a glass of dry sherry; a third for saying that he detested bridge; and a fourth for proclaiming—in what connection he was not quite clear—that his school days had been the unhappiest of his life. These people did not object to a little eccentricity; or perhaps they took it for granted that a writer, even with an approved school and university on his social passport, should be mildly eccentric. . . .

By the time that he went up to dress, Morley felt that he had swung an uncertain audience to his own side; and, when Allerdyce strolled in to ask how he was enjoying himself, he could afford to thank him for refusing overnight to send the car back to Reading.

"You said I should like the party," he added. "I do."

"Good! I feel I'm responsible for you," Allerdyce explained, standing in the open doorway and tossing his clothes on a chair.

Morley tried the words over to see if they contained a hint of patronage.

"I hope I'm not a weight on your shoulders," he answered.

"You would only be that if I caught you looking at me in dumb reproach, wondering why ever I persuaded you to come. It just occurred to me that you might find it rather slow here after London . . ."

Morley smiled to himself as he began to undress. No one familiar with the life of Albany Terrace need fancy that the atmosphere of Silham

would pall quickly. And no one who had overheard his conversation with Penelope need think that time was hanging on his hands. Whenever he remembered that sudden, queer light in her eyes, he could feel a little tremor of excitement passing through him. And they were to be together for as long as he chose!

"You can easily have too much of London," he answered, turning to bury his face in a bowl of lilac. "There's a little cottage in the wood here which I should like to rent. One could work there . . . What time do we dine?," he asked, as a gong began to rumble through the house.

"Half-past eight. As I'm ready, shall I have first bath?" Allerdyce turned back to his own room; then, catching sight of the clothes laid out on Morley's bed, he paused to add: "By the way, a short coat and a black tie, you know. If your man has only sent you full regimentals, I can rig you out."

He was away without waiting for an answer; and Morley stood blinking, as though he had been wakened from a dream by a bucket of cold water in his face. So much for the idea that he was holding his own with credit in unfamiliar surroundings! And this humiliating offer would have to be accepted. Humiliating, because he stood exposed, to Allerdyce of all people, as a social beginner who did not know what every one else in the house would understand without asking. His "man", indeed! Had he a man to pack for him, there would have been no mistake; but how was Rose to know, when he had not said where he was staying, that the men would wear

only short coats? And why had he, who after all had seen them the night before, said nothing to guide her? It was a lapse, which Allerdyce had noted; a lapse from which Allerdyce was saving him.

"He's *responsible* for me!," Morley snorted. "Just as well, he's saying to himself . . ."

And he was being so diplomatic about it all, putting the blame on a non-existent "man" . . . Diplomatic or most insolently foolish! What picture, if any, had these prosperous, established people made of the life and circumstances of a writer on the threshold of his career? Was he presumed to have, like Allerdyce, a car and a chauffeur and a house in the country and a secretary and the-Lord-knew-what-else? Yes, by Jove, he was! These things mattered to them, they were all that did matter; and they despised any one who fell below their material standard.

His confidence destroyed as abruptly as it had been born, Morley bathed and dressed with a dour determination to shew that he could not be despised with impunity. Nor patronized. Nor flattered. His aggressiveness flamed into almost open hostility when Allerdyce, with his passion for offering advice, warned him, as though he had given the whole of his mind to it for the last half-hour, against withdrawing too far from what he affectedly called "the sound of men's voices and the tramp of their feet as they go about their daily tasks."

"Haven't you all you require at this farm you were going to last night? What you were saying this afternoon makes me wonder, in chastened

mood, whether I know in the least how people talk nowadays, what they talk about, how they live . . ."

Morley smiled sardonically to find himself the recipient of a good mark from the all-wise Allerdyce. He had propounded a great truth, had he?, in hinting that a man should keep in touch with the conditions he tried to describe.

"The temptation's not a serious one," he answered, as they went down. "So long as I have my work on the *Literary Review* . . . For you? Well, I suppose you *do* meet the people you're writing about. An enemy might say," he continued with scant respect, "that you never wrote about any one else, as though all but perhaps one in a hundred thousand of the population had no existence . . ."

"Oh, come!" Allerdyce's lined face softened to a patient smile. "In my time I've tried my hand at cabinet ministers and labour members and *impresarios* and chorus girls and private soldiers and field-marshals. If I've dropped some of them now—as I've had to drop schoolboys and undergraduates and *débutantes*—, it's simply because I no longer meet them. I might carry the war into your camp by saying that you write as though America—not to mention Russia, France, China, Germany and India—had no existence."

"But I never write or speak as though the Americans existed on sufferance! They're creating something; and, whether I like it or not, that always commands my respect. It's the unproductive class, who spend their time carrying on a tradition they've inherited, that might really be

asked to shew cause why they shouldn't be put into the nearest lethal chamber."

The hall was empty; and Morley picked up an evening paper as a hint that this discussion was unprofitable. Allerdyce would only think he was suffering from an inferiority complex; but he was angry with himself for feeling humiliated by the incident of the evening coat. To a sane man with a just perspective these petty conventions were contemptible; and, if he could lash out at the false values which he breathed in with the very air of this place, he might recover the integrity of spirit which he felt to be weakening whenever he tried to meet these people on their own ground.

"I should have thought the unproductive class had almost ceased to exist," said Allerdyce. "You certainly won't find many members of it in this house. As for carrying on the tradition they've inherited . . . Isn't that what we all do?"

"We don't all behave as though any other tradition would rank us with Hottentots! It *amuses* me to hear the stalls and boxes in a theatre say: '*Who* does *go to the dress circle?*' This ghastly assumption of superiority by people who are probably inferior in everything but money! If *anybody* ever had to justify his existence . . . However, I'm opposed on principle to grading my fellow-creatures like eggs!"

3

He turned at the sound of footsteps on the stairs. Sir Victor Winton, portly and red-faced, was

coming down with Lord Silchester; and from their expression of faint surprise Morley judged that some part of his outpouring had been overheard. Well, it would do them no harm!

"Who's being condemned to the lethal chamber?," Winton asked. "Not every one over forty, I hope. I admit I used to advocate that while I was still under forty myself . . ."

"Darville objects," Allerdyce explained, "to the social intolerance of a certain class . . ."

"It's not that so much as their arbitrariness," said Morley. "An Oxford don probably speaks more literary English than a taxi-driver and is entitled to look down on him in consequence. When you come to a thing like slang, though, a certain coterie decrees that 'bus' is permissible and 'phone' is vulgar. The fact that the coterie in question is the one that Allerdyce describes in his books . . ."

He broke off as a door upstairs opened and closed. A sound of light footsteps travelled down to the hall; and he stood up as Penelope came in sight. It was impossible to continue wrangling now! She descended with the grace and ease—so natural to her!—that a lovely young actress might learn after years of coaching. And in some way she gave Morley an impregnable sense of being genuine throughout. She was really young, unlike the vivacious Mrs. Fildes who only knew the last trick in making herself seem young. She was really beautiful, unlike the once-lovely Lady Agnes Menteith, who seemed always to be clutching at a beauty that was leaving her. . . .

"I suppose some one must set the fashion . . ."

Morley roused to find that the hall had mysteriously filled and that he was the centre of a rambling debate.

"According to the B.B.C. announcers . . ."

"That delightful body, the Society for Pure English . . ."

Dinner was announced; and they went in to a confused accompaniment of "*I* always say . . ." and "Oh, but is that wrong?" Morley was disappointed to find himself separated from Penelope, but he could see her better than at luncheon and the conversation at present was general. He sat silent while the speech of London was pitted against that of Edinburgh and Dublin; an attack on the conscious elegance of the "Oxford voice" provoked a counter-attack on the indifferent slovenliness of the stage and of "society"; and, when the amateurs had tied themselves in knots, the expert was called in to set them free.

"I'm not sure that I know what good English is," Mr. Trott confessed wryly, "but I evidently don't speak it. If Mr. Darville wants to set up general chaos . . ."

"I should be content to induce humility of spirit," Morley answered, "among the people who undertake to lead fashion. If their speech is so shaky, can we trust their guidance in morals and manners? I want more tolerance, but these leaders of fashion *assume* that in a certain social grade every one votes conservative, every one's a member of the Church of England, every one approves of our national sports and pastimes. If you vote labour or confess to being a congregationalist, you're marked down as an oddity. For myself,

I don't want to be judged, so I judge not. A novelist is essentially a spectator . . ."

He broke off on discovering that, as at luncheon, he was being left behind.

"Social intercourse would become very difficult," Sir Victor hazarded, "if you couldn't assume a foundation of common beliefs. I hate having to look round the table for fear of offending people's susceptibilities. In my young days, before Home Rule and Tariff Reform came to disturb the peace, society was divided into Whigs and Tories; and, when feeling ran high, you didn't meet."

"And wouldn't it be better," suggested Lady Silchester, "never to mention religion or politics until every one has hung out a flag to shew his colours?"

"With a certificate," added Lady Agnes, "that he can keep his temper. Have you been much troubled, Mr. Darville, by these assumptions you speak of? As a spectator . . ."

"I've been more perplexed than troubled," Morley answered. "Years ago, when I confessed to radical sympathies at Eton, some scornful Tory asked me whether I was in favour of free love. I've wondered, ever since, what the connection was."

"My brother would tell you," said Penelope, "that the essence of political argument is to pin your opponent down to something he hasn't said."

Aldermaston laughed; and the conversation began to dissolve into duologues. Morley found his gaze being drawn to the other side of the table; and he studied Penelope's grey eyes and dark hair until a voice murmured his name and he heard

Lady Agnes asking whether duty or pleasure ever took him to Newmarket.

"If so, I wish you'd come and see us," she added. "Or, if London's a better place for meeting, Archie and I have a little flat in Charles Street which we use when he's not racing."

"That's very kind of you," said Morley.

Were these people, he wondered, as hospitable to everybody? Or had he scored some freak success by telling them a few obvious truths? There was something almost touching in their eagerness for discussion. It was not that they lacked brains or education: in a dozen fields, from gardening and sculpture to history and French literature, one or other could give him a start and a beating. It seemed, though, as if their capacity for wonder was atrophied; and they hung on his words whenever he challenged an assumption. Had none of them indulged in undergraduate debates on the existence of God and the end of life?

"We'll fix something up as soon as you get back," Lady Agnes continued. "Are you going to Sir Victor's this next week-end? I know he wants you."

"He has concealed it from me so far," Morley laughed. A good mark from Sir Victor too? "The great drawback to my work," he added cautiously, "is that it keeps me tied so much to London. Except in the dead season, when no manager would dream of putting on a new play, you're never your own master."

"And, when you *can* escape, I suppose you want all the time you can get for your own work.

You ought to come here in October, you know. The woods are *too* lovely! And, if you made it quite clear that you wouldn't shoot, you'd find it a delightful place to work. We shall be here then and we could motor you up for the Cesarewitch meeting."

"I'm . . . overwhelmed!," Morley answered.

4

A FAINT sound at his side caused him to turn; and he found that his glass was being refilled with champagne.

"Thanks," he murmured, when it was half full.

One would have to keep an eye on the butler, Morley decided. At the moment he was entirely free from shyness; and, given the opportunity, he felt that he could talk brilliantly. He had almost forgotten the "humiliation" of the borrowed jacket; and, when its unfamiliar shape reminded him, he remembered also that Allerdyce had been very decent about it. No doubt he would be as decent again when asked to advise on the embarrassing question of tipping the servants. . . . Morley needed only to be sure that his new contentment was not the ephemeral glow of unaccustomed champagne.

No, the feeling came from something less material than wine. Every one was being so amazingly kind! Not satisfied to take a stranger to their bosom, they invited him to return. He would not be caught hesitating a second time!

After all, why should he? The houses of which he now had any experience fell into three categories: the middle-class Bohemian of the Tidmans and their set, the middle-class professional of his father and all the accountants, lawyers and doctors who made up the social world of Albany Terrace, and then this leisured-class, titled-class, landed-class (whatever it should be called!) variety. Well, unless—like old Uncle—one were too lazy to get into evening clothes, unless—like his father or Henry—one were too awkward and ignorant to feel at ease anywhere but at home, there could be no question—Morley felt—which was the most enjoyable kind of house, company and life. And, if his kindly neighbours insisted on making more fuss of him than he deserved, he could calm his conscience with the reflection that perhaps he deserved more fuss than certain of his relations were ready to accord him.

Perhaps, again, the fuss was not really excessive. Apart from Allerdyce, who—so strangely—would rather be a wit among lords than a lord among wits, not one of these people could create anything; they were hardly trained even to appreciate what others created. The world of imagination—very properly suspect!—was fenced off behind a safe and easy preoccupation with sport and politics and industry and finance. A writer, however humble, however near the bottom of the ladder, must seem a portent to those who could not string six words together. Absurd to think that they were only trying to put him at his ease when they encouraged him to hold forth . . .

Vaguely conscious that he was being watched,

Morley glanced up to find Penelope's eyes on him. Though she looked away at once, he had time to see her expression, which was grave and in some way enquiring. Was she too saying: "*What now?*," he wondered. Did she, on the strength of one rambling discussion, feel that he had the power to do something great? When, five months from now, they walked together in the yellowing woods and she asked him what he had been writing all the summer, would he be able to remind her of that afternoon's conversation and of her confident prediction that success was waiting for him to seize?

Morley's mind leapt forward with kangaroo bounds. The book was written. Press and public were in ecstasy. Congratulations, cheques, requests for free sittings, interviews poured in on him, as—he supposed—they must pour in on Allerdyce. Publishers fought for his next contract, hostesses petitioned him for his first free day. Rich and independent, he abandoned his hack-work for the *Literary Review*, forsook the converted nursery in Albany Terrace, launched out into bachelor chambers where he could give parties and invite Penelope to hear that her inspiration had brought all this about. . . .

His glass had been filled again. How much had he drunk? At home, on the rare occasions that champagne appeared, there was a glass for each of them and two for his father: no danger, there, of a coloured vision! Why, though, waste time on thinking of home? It was pleasanter, surely, to imagine what he would do if, on his next visit here, he awoke to find himself rich and famous.

Would Penelope tell him that her faith was justified? Would her eyes look at him with that curious dark fire which he had seen shining from them whenever she was moved? Would her people, who had already swallowed Allerdyce, be ready to swallow him? There was, alas!, no house in Dorsetshire, no family record in the diplomatic service. . . .

Morley caught sight of his own reflection in a gleaming silver racing-cup. There was nothing amiss with his looks except, maybe, the tentative side-whiskers; and these could be reduced by imperceptible degrees until his appearance became as conventional as Menteith's or Aldermaston's. He had already that day discarded his tortoise-shell spectacles when he was not reading; and, if a stranger were asked to say which of all the men was a member of parliament, which a writer and which an amateur of pedigree cattle, he would guess wrong twice out of three times. That was one note of the Allerdyce world: not to be conspicuously different or indeed conspicuous at all. . . .

And what, Morley enquired of himself in sudden reaction, would they make of his triumph in a world which he seemed to have left behind for ever? Would Dora cry out: "*Heavens! Another popular novelist*"? Morley Darville, succeeding to the frayed mantle of Robin Allerdyce: how the young Tidmans would revel over that!

The conversation seemed to be becoming general again; and Mrs. Fildes interrupted an argument with Aldermaston to ask Morley for his definition of "romance". The expert again!

"Beauty, combined with strangeness, is the conventional interpretation," he answered. Penelope was once more watching him; and he found that he was talking to her, even though his face was still turned to his neighbour. "I'm never quite satisfied with it," he continued pensively. "The *Odyssey* has all the strangeness and all the beauty that any one could want, but I don't regard it as a romance. You must add an idea of actuality, a feeling that the thing happened or might have happened; and I don't believe that the episode of Circe and the swine was credible even to Homer's contemporaries. On the other hand, the story of King Cophetua and the beggar-maid is strange and beautiful and at the same time possible."

"Mrs. Fildes was asking me whether a painter could properly be called 'romantic'," Aldermaston explained.

"I submit that Turner could not properly be called anything else," Morley replied. "When a friend protested that he had never seen a sunset like Turner's, you remember the final and perfect retort: '*Don't you wish you could?*' When a romantic writer is told that what he's written isn't 'life', his answer might well be: '*Don't you wish it were?*' If I were competent to write romance, I should like the verdict on my work to be that for a single moment I had invested a single character or scene with such beauty as no one hitherto had believed to exist. The vague dreaming and hungry yearning of all the ages . . ."

Though no one tried to interrupt him, Morley stopped in horror at his own language. The others would think him drunk or mad to be vapouring like

this! The "yearning of all the ages"! Captain Menteith and Mr. Trott were looking frankly uncomfortable; and, though Allerdyce was nodding his head at intervals, no one could say whether he was applauding this windy rhetoric or telling himself that young men who were not used to unlimited champagne should go steadily until they knew how soon their tongues were loosened. Only Penelope seemed anxious that he should go on; and, before she could offer him a word of encouragement, Lady Silchester was collecting the eyes of the other women.

Morley threw open the door and stood by it as they passed through. How much, he asked himself, now remained of the success which he had fancied he was scoring? In three days he would be back at work; in a week Penelope would have forgotten his very name. And serve him . . .

"Now, don't sit here talking half the night, Mr. Darville."

Morley started to discover that she was by his side.

"As I've talked almost without ceasing ever since I came here . . . ," he began.

"Ah, but I want you to go on! You don't play bridge, do you? There's a whole lot I want to discuss with you."

She was gone as swiftly and silently as she had come; and Morley found himself standing by an empty doorway and listening to a fast-dwindling

rustle of clothes and murmur of voices. A faint fragrance of carnations and the memory of a smile lingered like the last fragment of a dream. He was conscious that his mind had somehow been made up for him and that at any cost he must succeed, succeed. . . . Then the voices in the hall died away; and he heard his host telling Aldermaston to circulate the wine.

"Bring your glass to this end, Darville," said Lord Silchester. "Winton, here, is complaining —to your address—that the great business novel has still to be written. I should have thought it had been done successfully in America?"

"If you're going to talk about America," interposed Aldermaston, "I have a problem for you. I'm going there this summer and I'm most shamefully ignorant of their contemporary literature. Robin says that you're the man to draw up a syllabus, Darville. I know a few names; Sinclair Lewis, Cabell and so on . . ."

Morley nodded and called for a pencil and paper. He must succeed at all costs, in every way, losing no single opportunity! If he could capture this table, Allerdyce might laugh his fill that any one should not know when to wear a black tie or how much to give a footman. If he could dominate the "illiterate barbarians", they would soon cease to exchange curious glances when he let himself go! The heretic was triumphing; and the orthodox were asking if he would direct them to the stake!

He talked, as he wrote; and, as he talked, the other conversations died down. Here at last was a subject on which he could speak with knowledge, a subject that mattered and with knowledge more than

equal to Menteith's knowledge of the stud-book! Hardly a novel of the last ten years had come from America to England without passing through his hands; he had a retentive memory; and it had been his business to formulate a considered criticism and to accord each book its place. How long he spoke Morley could not guess. The servants had twice come tentatively into the room, had twice withdrawn noiselessly, before he made an end. As he relighted his cigar, he was thanked in turn by Aldermaston, Silchester and Winton. As they left the table, Allerdyce came round to congratulate him.

"Not only on what you've just said," he added, "though that was quite admirable."

Morley eyed him cautiously, but there was no hint of irony in his praise.

"One of these days," he answered, "I should like to discuss this party with you."

"There's nothing I should enjoy more. I predict," Allerdyce continued with a mysterious smile, "that, when you look back on it, you'll say it was the greatest turning-point of your life."

"I wonder what you mean by that!"

"Whatever I mean and whatever you mean, you *feel* that, don't you?"

"I'd rather not say . . . yet. Did you do this deliberately? Planting me here, I mean?"

"You know! It was a pure accident, your coming. But I thought it would be good for you to stay."

"I wish I knew what you meant by that, too," Morley sighed.

Allerdyce laughed and went ahead into the hall.

"I don't like working at night," he said, "but

there's something I *must* finish. I shall see you in the morning."

"You're not coming in . . . ? Well, good-night!"

Morley walked on, suddenly perplexed. It was very late. He had indeed been "talking half the night", as Penelope had urged him not to do. No doubt, however, these people sat up late. He would have time for a long talk with her, even now.

And Allerdyce had cleared out, leaving him in possession!

PART THREE

CHAPTER ONE

THE RETURN OF THE PROPHET

I

On his way back to London, Morley tried to forget the pang of leaving Silham by busying himself with a formula that should blunt the curiosity of his friends and relations without telling them anything of importance or departing dangerously far from veracity.

"*Robin Allerdyce offered me a lift to Burnham,*" he at last decided to say. "*We got talking and overshot our mark. The people he was staying with put me up for the night and asked next day why I shouldn't stop for a bit. As it was a part of the country I didn't know . . .*"

If he talked in this way, there was an even chance that the more impressionable members of the family would be so much excited by the idea of his becoming the bosom-friend of Allerdyce that they would not suspect him of withholding a secret which they would inevitably vulgarize by inane questions and inept comments. How expect them to understand what he did not understand himself, or to appreciate what he could not express in words? An atmosphere, a colour-effect, an indefinable fragrance . . . Shutting his eyes, he could hear

again Lord Silchester saying: "Well, good-bye, m'dear Darville. Great pleasure to see you here, but I never shewed you those broadsides. Remind me next time." He could see Archie Menteith cantering across the park to call out: "You're in the book, I suppose? I told Agnes to fix up a night . . ." And he could feel the friendly pressure of Lady Silchester's hand as she said: "Yes, but can you be trusted to invite yourself? *Any* week-end you're disengaged . . ."

His farewell of Penelope, taken late on his last night, Morley kept as a memory apart. "I wish you weren't going." (He had every word of the dialogue by heart.) "Lady Penelope, so do I!" "*Please* don't call me 'Lady Penelope'! Well, it was great luck getting you at all. And you're going to be in London now till August? If I come up . . ." "*Do* let me know! If there are any plays . . . I shall have seen them all and I may save you some disappointments. We might dine somewhere . . ." "Yes, but you're a busy man. Or you're *going* to be. Our book . . ."

And then, with one white arm curved like a halo round her dark head, Penelope had talked of the book he was to write and the success he was to achieve.

"And I'm *going* to!," Morley whispered to himself.

Hitherto, so long as a few sympathetic friends applauded, he had affected not to care greatly whether he succeeded or not. It was more amusing to coin clever phrases about other people, to pick holes in the characters which they chose to portray

and to presume that their popularity was due to some kind of trick. A very few days in Allerdyce's company shewed Morley that the first quality in writing was a capacity for hard work of which he had never dreamed when the young Tidmans and Dora sat up half the night talking of books which they seldom began and never finished. He was going to work seriously now.

The subject which Penelope offered him was nothing less than a picture of English society since the war, by one who moved up and down without preconceptions and prejudices, the "windscreens and cushions of life", as she called them, which always left her uneasily wondering what kind of volcano might be distantly rumbling under the exquisite calm of Silham Park.

"People like daddy and Sir Victor," she complained, "speak for their *groups*, like the people in Galsworthy's *Loyalties*, but I've felt all the time you've been here that you're just *yourself*. A professional spectator, if you like . . . Robin was a spectator in early days, but he's almost *too* much in love with things as they are. Promise me that, when you're successful, *you* won't become like that!"

2

As the train bore him ever more swiftly from Silham and the sight of Penelope's eager face so near his own, Morley whispered again and again the phrases which they had exchanged as he stood with her slim, soft hand clasping his. "That's

a bargain, then! When you're successful, you're to remain just as you are now. No concessions to other people!" "And on your side," he had stipulated, "there's to be no change either! When I'm turned out of here for speaking my mind, you'll still consent to meet me?" "I promise! . . . You haven't seen a handkerchief anywhere, have you?" "Yes! You used it to mark your place in this book. I don't think you want it; and I know I do. It will be fluttered reproachfully at you if I ever catch you weakening."

"'*You're just* yourself' . . . ," Morley murmured to the blank screen of his fellow-passengers' newspapers.

That, apparently, was a merit in the eyes of Penelope, perhaps in the eyes of them all. And yet if they knew him as he knew himself! Timorous, irritable, touchy; tortured by self-consciousness; neurotically exalted at one moment and dejected at the next; arrogant of mind and thin of skin . . . Young Marcus Tidman once said of him that he had brought nothing away from Eton but an inferiority-complex. If this was "himself" . . . Obviously, there must be something more. Penelope and he had been near together, temperamentally, from the first; on that last night they had been near together physically. The fragrant warmth of her body could be felt as she lay curled in a deep chair and he sat on a cushion at her feet. She did not mind his being so near. She did not mind, later, when he kissed her hand in saying good-bye. Perhaps, if she had known how much he suddenly wanted to feel her white arms round his neck, she would have laughed

and kissed him in return, though he dared not hope that she was even beginning to be in love with him. He would say that she had never yet been in love with any one. . . .

As the train raced through the drowsing countryside, Morley tried to imagine the picture which Penelope had painted from such hints of autobiography as he had let fall. A man who, first and last, was faithful to himself . . . At school, where he resisted the tyranny of athletics, and at Cambridge, where he abandoned the pursuit of dead learning and tried instead to develop his individual talent, he had been faithful to a vision and a purpose which his family and friends tried vainly to shake. If he had not been reduced, like Robin Allerdyce, to the general-utility market of Fleet Street, that might still come; and it required courage, of a kind that no one need despise, before a boy of nineteen could refuse flatly to enter his father's office, courage again before he could give up a profession when he was hardly established in it. If Penelope realized that he had been regarded for a year or two as the family failure, almost as the family disgrace, she had some reason perhaps for admiring his tenacity. Heaven knew, Morley did not want to pose either as hero or martyr, but it was refreshing to meet some one who believed in him. He was too ready to write himself down despondently as a coward who shirked difficulties and a boaster who made a virtue of his weakness. Really, that was morbid . . .

"*A man faithful to himself* . . ." He turned the phrase over to test its value in a peroration.

Some day, it might be, the Critics Club would be entertaining him; and old Uncle, coupling his name with the toast of "Literature", would be speaking of the early struggles and the deadly temptations that beset a writer who had to wait for recognition. "*Of Morley Darville we may say that in the darkest hour he was always faithful to himself . . .*" A pause. "*Ladies and gentlemen, I ask you to rise . . .*" In imagination Morley heard a rattle of "*Darville, Darville, Darville!*" He saw himself raising his head and bowing, preeminently to Penelope, whose great shining eyes would be saying "*What did I tell you?*"

The vision wavered and died as his fellow-passengers began to fold papers and look at watches. Leaving his luggage at Paddington, Morley went by tube to Chancery Lane and walked to the office of the *Literary Review*. At intervals during the last week he had told himself firmly that he must come to an understanding with Dora; but he had still to find a means of dropping gently out of her life without arousing her resentment or even her suspicions.

"Which is going to be damned difficult," he had to admit.

Strange to think that it was only a week since the dinner at the "Bleeding Heart", only a fortnight since he had begun to make a fool of himself with this creature! She, naturally, would not expect to see any change . . .

Morley flushed hotly to recall their last meetings. What would the flowerlike, virginal Penelope think if she could have seen Dora sitting half-dressed on his knees? It was no excuse to say that he was

unused to women and that, when one of them flung herself at him, she upset his balance. His fastidiousness had been offended at the time; and he had tried to defend himself by saying that he was in love with her.

This, if she were set on attaching him to herself, would need some explaining away. He could hardly have changed round in a fortnight, unless in that time he had met some one who attracted him more; and, though Dora might readily have let him go and taken in his place a man who knew a good offer when he met one, she would cling to him like a fury if she imagined that she had a rival to displace.

"I couldn't be expected to know that within two hours of leaving her last week . . . ," he began. Would an impartial judge say that he had behaved badly in forgetting her so quickly? He neither knew nor cared! So long as no one said that he had behaved badly to Penelope by not confessing this sordid entanglement before allowing himself to fall ever so slightly in love with her . . . "But it's *not* an entanglement," he corrected himself angrily.

Whatever it was, he had to admit a moment later, it needed to be handled resolutely. If Dora hinted that she might come to see him one week-end at Burnham . . .

It would be a sufficient answer, if the young Tidmans asked how he was getting on with his parody of Robin Allerdyce, to say that he was at work on a new book. This might silence even the insistent voices of his relations if he told them, later, that he was launching out into rooms of his

own. "When you're putting your heart and soul into a book," he grumbled parenthetically, "it's a little galling to be asked what time you went to bed last night. If I had a studio, I could ask Penelope to tea . . ." Whether it would satisfy Dora seemed more doubtful.

"Well, if she won't accept my explanation, she must make one up for herself," he resolved impatiently, as he turned out of Fleet Street.

3

It was like dropping back into another life to mount the creaking stairs and hear again the cracked bell as he threw open the door of the public office. The old bemedalled commissionaire half-rose from his chair and sat down again with a grunt of recognition. The new office-boy turned to stare. The typist looked up from her clattering machine to nod a curt "good-morning".

Morley pushed up the flap of the scarred mahogany counter and made for the door marked *Private*. Half-way across and with his escape cut off, it occurred to him that, if he had postponed his arrival for an hour, he would probably have had old Uncle to keep him in countenance. Through the open door of the private office he could see a girl's figure lolling in a revolving arm-chair; and, as he came in, Dora waved a foot in welcome.

"Our little lost sheep! Uncle was getting *so* anxious about you!," she exclaimed, tossing her head back to shake the hair out of her eyes.

"But this is the day I *said* I was coming back,"

Morley answered, unpacking his wallet and laying the manuscript of his weekly article on the table.

"Where have you been, though? Not at Burnham. That I *know*."

"You know such a lot!," he laughed.

"More than you think, perhaps. I know all about Sedge Farm. *And* the charming old couple who live there. I was even shewn the room where you work. Ought I to have paid another sixpence for that?"

Morley interrupted his unpacking and looked at her with raised eye-brows.

"When were you down there?," he asked and was annoyed to find that he could not keep a slightly hectoring note out of his voice.

"The day after that dinner. You've probably forgotten saying that, if I came down for the day, you'd take me for a picnic somewhere. I thought it would be fun to get into the country for a bit, so I boarded a charabanc. . . . The old couple were in a frightful stew! You hadn't come, you hadn't let them know . . ."

"I telegraphed, but not till about mid-day." Morley turned to the table where the new books for review were laid out. Why in the world had Dora, who was cockney to the marrow and had scorned his invitation as "too idyllic", discovered this sudden passion for the country? "I wish you had let me know!," he continued. "Not that I could have done much, as things turned out . . ."

Dora fished a crumpled cigarette from her inseparable yellow packet and lay back with her hands clasped behind her head.

"I'm waiting to be told how things *did* turn out," she reminded him. "I thought it very odd. And not very polite . . ."

"When you'd turned down my invitation? You can't work up a grievance over *that*, my dear!," Morley answered. "What happened was really rather funny," he continued, forcing a chuckle. "After we'd dropped you, Allerdyce and I got talking; and we overshot the turning to Burnham. Before we knew where we were, we'd arrived at the house where he was staying. As it was pretty late, his friends insisted that I should spend the night there; and next day they asked why I shouldn't stay on. The idea of Allerdyce and me in the same house . . ."

He looked up to see what reception his story was getting.

"Well, I'm glad it's no worse," said Dora. "When I told Uncle, we both felt sure you'd been vamped. A good-looking young man like you runs a great risk, Morley, with people of the rich, gay world. When women are too old and fat to get even a dago for a dancing-partner, they invariably take to patronizing art. Can you assure me that no one gave you a gold lip-stick or a jewelled powder-box?"

"On my word of honour. But what happened to you?," Morley asked, with an effort to seem adequately concerned. "When you drew blank at Sedge Farm, I mean?"

"I found a motor-bus that took me on to Maidenhead. There I spent the night. And next day I came back to London. How did you get on with the portentous Allerdyce?"

The abruptness of her transition was startling; and Morley wondered which of the many questions that crossed his mind she was most eager not to be asked. As she had spent a night away from London, she must have gone prepared or stayed unprepared. If prepared, was it her intention to force an entry into Sedge Farm? If unprepared, how had she got on at Maidenhead with no more luggage than a vanity-case? No doubt she had friends there. Indeed, if he were not mistaken, her one-time admirer Presterwyck had a bungalow at Bray or Bourne End. If only she would go back to him . . .

"The portentous Allerdyce, as you call him," Morley answered, "improves on acquaintance. Not that I saw a great deal of him. He was hard at work most of the time; and I was pretty busy with an idea that may grow into a book. If it *does*," he continued, as though this thought were occurring to him for the first time, "I shall have to get my nose down to the grindstone."

"Have you finished your chapter for our best-seller? Marcus shewed me his introduction. It's *really* brilliant. I'm not sure about my effort. If you're doing nothing to-night, you might eat a poached egg with me and I'll read it to you . . ."

Morley shook his head without looking at her. It was a good thing, after all, that Uncle was not here. Dora might pretend that she was conferring a casual favour, telling him that he might come to see her when he had made up his inhibition-bound mind, but in her present mood she could not be trusted to remain casual. The pilgrimage to Burnham shewed that. She was determined to

capture him; and he must make plain that he did not mean to be captured.

"Absolutely impossible, I'm afraid," he told her. "My people are expecting me . . ."

"What about to-morrow, then?"

"I must see what plans they've made."

There was a short silence which she filled by trying to blow smoke-rings.

"Wouldn't it be easier to say you don't want to come?," she asked, with her eyes to the ceiling.

"It's not a question of what I *want*," Morley broke out petulantly. "I haven't been home for a week, I've had no letters . . ."

"I suppose you were careful not to give any address."

"And, when you're living with people," he continued, disregarding her taunt, "you have to consider their convenience to *some* extent. Until I see what they've arranged for the week-end . . . Life's difficult enough, as it is. I've not yet convinced my excellent parents that I need any time for my work. For heaven's sake don't make things *more* difficult! If I'm to find a *moment* for this book . . ."

He paused with a mutter of apology and looked up to see whether Dora was impressed by his vehemence. Except to light a cigarette, she had hardly moved since he came into the room; and, except when he tossed his manuscript on old Uncle's table, Morley had remained by the door, turning over the new books and stowing away the old for subsequent selling in Charing Cross Road. She was to understand that he was here on business, in the working hours of an office with the subor-

dinate staff on the other side of the door. . . . To be sure, she had given no sign of expecting a scene of passion, but there had been a change in her voice, as she invited him to her flat, and a change in her expression and attitude, when he refused her invitation.

"*I* see," she answered.

"Why shouldn't you lunch with me?," he suggested. "You know that's my best time. Then you could read me the thing afterwards. I don't promise that I shall come up to scratch with my chapter. The next six months are going to be a busy time for me . . ."

"I shall look forward to seeing the great work when it's published. Perhaps Uncle will give it me to review," she drawled.

"I don't know how long you'll have to wait. There's so much bread-and-butter work . . . ," Morley grumbled. "Well, what about it? I shall be ready as soon as you are."

4

As he began to stuff his wallet with books, a handkerchief fell out. Morley let it lie for a moment, then slipped it inside an envelope.

"Fetichism?," Dora enquired.

"I was looking for that last night," he answered with simulated surprise. "The woman I lent this book to said she'd used it to mark her place . . ."

"I hope it's *not* fetichism. The police are frightfully down on that sort of thing. Handkerchief-snatching, cutting off girls' hair in the street.

Not that you have much chance when everybody's shingled . . . Is that your little aberration, Morley? If so, you ought to consult some one about it. Anybody who's studied sex-pathology . . ."

"You have a peculiarly unpleasant mind," said Morley. As she betrayed no interest in the ownership of the handkerchief, he could not afford to lose his temper at her salacious insinuations. "I think I may as well get along home. Unless," he added, "you *would* care to come and lunch somewhere? It's early, but I've had a train-journey."

Dora sat without moving, as though she meant him to see that his invitation was deficient in warmth:

"If you're going to be so busy, you can't want to waste time on me."

"If I thought it a waste of time, I shouldn't ask you," he returned.

"Old habits are hard to break! You don't seem to want me particularly."

Morley snapped the lock of his wallet and turned to face her. She was still lying back with her hands clasped behind her head, still—he would say—playing for time. It was a dangerous mood, a dangerous moment. If he made an enemy of Dora, she would assail him with a tongue unschooled in decency and by methods innocent of scruple, making a laughing-stock of him in the office and inventing psychoanalytical calumnies with the Tidmans to explain her own failure. If his book ever came to birth, she would smother it. If Penelope ever crossed her path, she would contrive to blast her or him or both. At almost

any cost, she must be appeased; but in some way he must make plain that he wanted nothing more than her friendship.

"My dear, we don't usually stand on so much ceremony," he told her with a frown of perplexity which he was far from feeling.

Dora unclasped her hands and held them to him. A spectator might have said that she was inviting Morley to pull her out of the big office-chair; he himself knew that she was waiting to be kissed and that this was her test for determining whether he had tired of her or fallen in love with some one else or was still struggling with his constitutional timidity. And there was no escape! Drawing her to her feet, he kissed her mouth and then held her to him so that she should not see his face. This was a triple betrayal, of Penelope, of Dora, of himself; a surrender to blackmail, which put him more and more at the mercy of the blackmailer until Dora should give him up in impatience of his backwardness. And, from the way she clung to him, she would need other and stronger proof of his indifference. In some ignoble fashion she still attracted him; and he responded, in spite of himself, to her caresses until a noise in the public office gave him an excuse for breaking away.

"It's all right," she whispered. "Uncle won't be here till this afternoon."

"Oh . . . ?"

The spell, however, was broken; and Morley ostentatiously picked up his hat before she could try to reestablish it. In future he would avoid this place as much as possible and always when

Dora was alone. There need be no quarrel if he kept out of her way; and, when she had betaken herself to some one more responsive, he would perhaps be immune to the physical appeal which she contrived to make when he wanted most to be repelled by her.

For her, too, the spell was at least interrupted; and, as she put on her hat and accompanied him into the street, she plied him with questions about his new book.

"It's all in the clouds at present," Morley answered. "When I was staying with these friends of Allerdyce's, they all told me that the great novel had still to be written about their own particular world. There was a member of parliament and a racing man and a shipping man . . . I suggested to one of them that the great novel of the literary world had still to be written. The truth is that no one has attempted a comprehensive study of England since the war. I don't mean that *I'm* competent to write it, but I do know my own experiences and emotions in one small corner of it . . ."

"If you dared tell the truth," Dora murmured.

"Well, I've nothing much to hide."

"That's not the danger. You're much more likely to invent, to put things in, to make the whole book romantic and false . . ."

They had reached their usual restaurant as they talked; and Morley went ahead to secure a table.

"The two things are hardly the same," he objected, as they sat down. "Romance . . ." His mind reverted to a late discussion at Silham. Strangeness and beauty . . . He saw in im-

agination the long mahogany table with its load of silver shining in the light of softly shaded candles; he saw the men-servants moving noiselessly behind the chairs or withdrawing to the shadows by the sideboard; and he saw a three-quarter-circle of gleaming shirt-fronts and black ties, bare shoulders and white arms. Beyond the down-pouring candle-light he could fancy that Penelope's eyes, with their "dark fire", were watching him. "Romance . . . ," he tried again. "Look here, what are you going to eat?"

He pushed a *menu* at her and opened the wine-list. The less he talked about the redeeming fineness of life, the better! With her immature cynicism, Dora had a rare knack of making beauty seem vulgar or childish. And no doubt he had encouraged her with his own superior way of asking how sensible people could be "taken in" by this or that. His own romance was sacred. He would not have her parodying it into a grotesque film-story of an obscure and unsuccessful writer who was inspired to fame by falling in love with a miraculous combination of youth, rank, beauty and intelligence. . . .

"I always feel you're afraid to call things by their proper names," Dora told him. "Now, if I were writing about this blessed literary life, I should describe it exactly as it is. My father and mother, to begin with, and myself . . . I don't say it would make good reading for Sunday schools, but it would knock spots off the usual rot that every young novelist, male and female, seems compelled to write as a second or third book. It would probably shock you . . ."

"Go on," said Morley.

He was only listening with one ear, but she seemed content to prattle on, with a rare nod or frown to stimulate her; and, when at last they parted, it was on her discovery that she was already overdue at the office. Well, she could not accuse him of wanting to get rid of her! As they shook hands, Morley felt almost justified in hoping that she would be satisfied to remain friends, until she left him for some one else. Certainly she made no further effort to monopolize him.

"Tell Uncle I looked in to report," he ventured, as they walked back along Fleet Street. "If he wants me, you can telephone, but I should like to work quietly at home for a bit."

"I'll tell him you're writing the story of your life," answered Dora. "Let me know if I can help. It can't be very full at present."

5

Left to himself, Morley wandered to Hyde Park and sat on a bench, reading, until he had given the family time to assemble in Albany Terrace. He felt restless, deflated and faintly nervous. At half-past six he collected his luggage and returned home for the seven o'clock dinner which Mr. Darville retained in honour of some dear, departed ancestor and which Mrs. Darville approved on the score of its giving them all a "nice long evening afterwards".

There was no point in having to tell more than once the story of his changed plans for Whit-

suntide; and Morley was chiefly concerned to gratify his parents' curiosity in such a way that it would be glutted when next he went to Silham. "*I was with some friends of Allerdyce's*," he rehearsed. "*Extraordinarily hospitable. I quite enjoyed myself. A mother, father, son, two daughters and a certain number of visitors. They've asked me to go back in the autumn . . .*" And, when the autumn came, he would be able to say: "*Those people I was staying with at Whitsuntide, you remember . . .*"

If Dora touched nothing that she did not desecrate, his relations seemed incapable of discussing anything without vulgarizing it. With Rose it was a frank and healthy inquisitiveness, with his father a gloomy suspicion, with his mother a misplaced pride; but, whatever the mental twist, they achieved the same tarnishing result. Good heavens, when his first book was in the press, they had combined to make Morley wish he had never written it! "*What's it about? . . . You know we have an author in the family? . . . I hope you won't let this writing interfere with your serious work at the Bar . . .*"

"I suppose I must put up with them until I've made enough money to break away," he decided. "If I *do* have a success with this book . . ."

Carrying his suitcase upstairs to escape the charge of "littering the hall", Morley washed his hands and came down to the drawing-room. Mrs. Darville looked up from the inexhaustible advertisements of her illustrated paper and held out her arms to him.

"At *last!*," she cried, letting fall her knitting. As Morley picked it up, he wondered whether she unravelled it at night or left that task to the cat. "My precious boy, what happened to you?"

"Rather an amusing *contretemps* . . . ," he began.

Mr. Darville, in his inseparable smoking jacket and slippers, glanced over the top of the *Evening Standard*, which he was clutching as though he had carried it off in triumph from an evenly matched contest.

"We've been anxious about you," he grunted. "It would really have been more considerate if you'd let us know . . ."

Before he could finish, Rose hurried in.

"Hullo, Morley!," she cried. "You owe me five and eight for sending you those clothes. What happened? You said you were going to Burnham."

Morley waited until his brother came in and then told his tale, lingering over his meeting and drive with Allerdyce. As he had foreseen, the name instantly monopolized the attention of his audience; and, whenever he made a pretence of wanting to describe the great man's friends, he was recalled by questions about the great man himself.

"Will you see him again?," Rose asked, bright-eyed with excitement. "I'd *love* to meet him!"

"I should think it could be arranged," Morley answered. "I'll ask him to dine some night . . ."

"And see if you can't get Barrie and dear old Kipling to come along," Henry suggested with ponderous jocularity.

"He must make a great deal of money by his writing," murmured Mr. Darville. "Now, if you could model yourself on *him*, Morley . . ."

"Easier said than done."

"I'm struck by what you say about his application," Mr. Darville continued. "Hard work, whether it's writing books or sitting on the despised office-stool . . ."

"There at least I *can* copy him," Morley broke in. "And I'm going to. Beginning to-night . . ."

"Well . . . Don't forget that electric light has to be paid for. As I was saying, hard work . . . There's no reason you *shouldn't* make money. Other people seem to. I should be delighted if you *did* . . ."

"So, curiously enough, should I," Morley answered. "And I mean to," he added to himself. "If I don't escape from here . . . And very soon . . ."

At Silham, he calculated, they would now be going up to dress for dinner. . . .

CHAPTER TWO

SELF-EXAMINATION

I

For a day or two after his return to London, Morley nursed a fragile hope that Penelope would find some reason for writing to him. For a day or two more, he tried to invent an excuse for writing to her. Then, as the memories of his week at Silham became fainter, the day-dreams which they had inspired began to seem fantastic; and he subjected himself to douches of common sense calculated to cool his head and clear his eye.

Whatever, he told himself, his position might be in one or five years' time, he was at present a young man of small attainments and smaller means. His social background was uncertain. And, though the Silchesters were the last people in the world to enquire about the antecedents or bank-balance of any one introduced to them by one of their oldest friends, Morley knew that he would have only himself to blame if he shut his eyes to certain differences of habit and thought which were little less obvious and no more easily reconcilable than differences of creed or colour. On a page of *The Times* to which hitherto he had paid scant attention there appeared at intervals

the heading *HOUSE PARTY*; and his eye was caught by the name of Lord Aldermaston, or of Captain and Lady Agnes Menteith, or of Lady Penelope Brayle. Some times there would be a photograph, in the *Tatler* or *Sketch*; and he would see Penelope sitting between a cabinet minister and an ambassador. The house behind this exalted company was always the "famous" or "historic" seat of some illustrious family that was united by blood or marriage to every other illustrious family. However little Penelope liked it, this—Morley had to recognize—was where she belonged; these were her friends, this her life. The sooner one faced that, the better.

Penelope might fancy that the spirit of caste had been weakened by the war, but she would find out her mistake if she strayed outside this circle. Dining with Lady Agnes, Morley had heard Archie Menteith commenting on the breeders, owners and trainers of his acquaintance and observing of this one or another that he was "not in the stud-book, of course." In some way this seemed to be an ultimate test, against which there was no appeal. A man might be a "great gentleman" or a "good fellow" or a "tough" or a "sportsman"; one might meet him or avoid him; but, if he was not to be found "in the stud-book", the intimacy would stop short at one of two or three recognized points. Mankind, in Archie Menteith's estimate, was divided into those with whom one would or would not go tiger-shooting, those whom one would or would not put up for one's club and those whom one would or would not like to see marrying one's sister.

"Or one's sister-in-law?," Morley asked himself.

The Darvilles, for two generations London solicitors, and before that untraceable—non-armigerous, not landed gentry if they were gentry at all (Morley believed that, as a master of arts of Cambridge University, he was entitled to call himself "esquire")—, had no place in the sacred book. On the other hand, Allerdyce had offered to put him up for the Thespian Club. Did this mean anything? In the human stud-book at least there must be constant modification. One strain deteriorated, another was crossed with unknown blood; and in every generation a place was claimed by those who were not thoroughbred at all.

"They would have to accept me if I did something really big," Morley reasoned. Even Menteith wouldn't say that Shakespeare was a great writer, but 'of course not in the stud-book'. Time enough to think of that, though, when I've done something to deserve it."

What amused and perplexed him alternately was that in a sense he had been "accepted" already. In the first days after his return to London he had met more new people and entered more new houses than in the ten years preceding. All 'stud-book' people, too! The ball was set rolling by old Sir Victor Winton, who gave a luncheon-party at Claridge's. While waiting for his host, Morley had caught sight of Miss Allendale, who introduced him to her mother. At once he was invited to another luncheon-party at which he was handed on to three more.

For a day or two Morley told himself that, as these people were—directly or indirectly—Penelope's friends, he had a chance of meeting her in their houses. Then—his head cool and his eye clear—he convinced himself that she was not going to write and that he was not going to meet her accidentally. In the meantime, one had to lunch somewhere.

"Besides . . ."

2

An inexhaustible flood of self-justification was dammed by that "besides" and by the defiant shrug that always accompanied it.

To enter new houses, to be taken on his merits and handed on appealed to Morley's spirit of adventure, which was only stimulated by the reproaches of his relations and the discouragement of his friends. Allerdyce, meeting him four days running, explained that he was taking a holiday and seeing something of his cronies, but that Morley would find it was impossible to lead a social life while he was working. His family commented unsparingly on his new clothes and on the ingenious excuses which he grasped to get away from Albany Terrace. Simple people like them, Mr. Darville complained, were evidently not good enough for his ambitious younger son, who had already made abundantly clear that he was not content to earn his living by regular work in regular hours.

"He'll have a shock one of these days," Morley told himself, "when he finds what work I *am* doing."

At the end of two all-night sittings he had sketched the *scenario* of his new novel; and, writing with a new facility that almost alarmed him, he was completing the first draft of two chapters a week. What did it matter if he was living, as his mother warned him, on his nerves? If only people would leave him alone! It was, alas!, not only the family that took an unwelcome interest in him. After one or two encounters with old Uncle at the houses of his new friends, Morley found spreading among the young Tidmans a legend that, since his meeting with Allerdyce at the Critics Club dinner, he had discovered his spiritual home to lie in Mayfair. A lampoon from the bitter pen of Marcus found its way into the bookshops of the Chelsea elect; and an unsigned caricature depicted "the novelist at work" with a wet towel and a *Peerage*. Adapting one of Uncle's phrases, Morley tried to assure himself that these self-conscious Bohemians were sneering at a section of society because they were not admitted to it, but he was glad that Dora did not see him setting out to the Menteiths' box at Epsom in white spats and a grey top-hat. . . .

She could not be expected, any more than his parents, to understand the charm of a life that was in any way different from her own. At the same time, it was impossible to ignore her. Since the day of his return from Silham, Dora had been friendly when they met and incurious when they did not meet. If Morley invited her, at the prick of conscience, to lunch with him, she accepted without asking why he so seldom came near the office nowadays. In moments of optimism he told him-

self that their affair had settled itself; only when he surprised her covertly watching him did he feel that she was adjuring him to "*confess and have done with it*".

Most gladly would Morley have "had done with" the irritation of these meetings, but her oddly disquieting air of knowing all his secrets frightened him into excessive cordiality. Within the last few days he had committed himself to a party at the Carlton to pacify her with a glimpse of Robin Allerdyce at close quarters. So it went on! The only change in the last month was that she had not again invited him to dine at her flat. If only she would flare up and say that she never wanted to see him again!

"I could then find out if Penelope was going to be in London," he reflected.

It was strange, after all her friendliness, that she had not written. Was her interest in "their" book polite insincerity? Did she say to every man that she *wished* he had not to go and that he *must* come again quite soon? Was she waiting for him to write first?

Morley pushed away the piled manuscript at which he had been staring for the last half hour. Four weeks! He drew a sheet of note-paper towards him. It was all very well to cultivate the clear eye and the cool head; but, the clearer the eye, the denser the confusion which it beheld. And after four seven-day weeks of nine hours a day he was slipping into a habit of staring at his manuscript and seeing pictures that had nothing to do with his narrative.

"*I have been wondering*," he began, "*whether*

you are going to be in London at all this summer. If so, please remember that you are pledged to keep a night for dining and coming to a play. Tell me what you would like to see and whether you would like any one else invited. I owe Robin Allerdyce several dinners . . ."

Morley paused to ask himself whether Penelope would thank him for including Allerdyce in the party and what she would make of his strange friendship with a man whom he had regarded at different times as an enemy and as a rival. They were meeting every other day; and once a week Allerdyce was giving dinner-parties at the Thespian. "*It might amuse you to meet a few of our* confrères," he would write, "*and indeed, as you're responsible for my being in London, I feel I can insist on your presence. Never again shall you charge me with standing aloof from the younger generation . . .*" It was impossible not to like the fellow; but, if they were in fact rivals, Penelope must think the intimacy odd. Perhaps, however, she felt that Allerdyce had dropped out of the running; perhaps, Morley conceded unhappily, it did not occur to either of them that he himself could ever be a rival.

"*I should have written before,*" he continued, "*but I have really been very hard at work. If I could make enough money to sever my connection with the* Literary Review, *I should like to settle somewhere in the country. It's very difficult to preserve any kind of individuality or detachment when you're living with your family; and I'm afraid it would look pointed if I set up in quarters of my own within a few miles of the parental roof-tree. If I moved to the country, though . . .*"

Morley stood up to stretch himself and look round the room which he could remember, five-and-twenty years before, as his nursery. If old Henry was thirty-four, their parents must have been living here for the best part of forty years. Would they never think of moving? Did his father, who was over sixty, ever contemplate retiring?

"If he'd only sell out and make a new start in different surroundings . . . I don't like snobbishness, but I dislike inverted snobbishness even more. It's no good *pretending* that he hasn't made money and outgrown this place. I should never *dream* of asking Penelope to come here! And yet, if I'm not to be accused of despising my own people . . . The only thing is for them to go their own way and let me go mine; but, until I've made some money, I shall be tied by the heel."

3

Morley finished his letter and glanced apprehensively at the latest pages of his manuscript. Would it seem as good now as he had thought it at three o'clock that morning? Easy writing, it was said, commonly made hard reading.

And had he veiled sufficiently the sources of his inspiration? He did not choose that the scornful young Tidmans should ask: "*Is this young rebel supposed to be* you?"; still less that the Silchesters, for example, should whisper: "*Is he writing about his own people?*" The book was to

be a history of what his life might have been, what it might be still. Was that not the formula by which Robin Allerdyce had achieved success? "*If you tell the story that you yourself want to hear, you may be sure it's a story that ten thousand other people want to hear.*" . . .

Really, there seemed no need for apprehension. This was good stuff! In two months' time, at the present rate and if he were not interrupted. . .

Morley turned in sudden fury at the sound of footsteps on the creaking stairs that led to his sanctuary; and he was only half appeased when his mother called out: "May I come in, darling boy? I've brought you your letters." It was good of her to toil up to the top of the house like this, but she would probably waste precious time in asking him how he was getting on with his book.

"You needn't have bothered, you know," he told her. "I was coming down anyway to post one of my own."

"If you will give it to me, Henry will take it," said Mrs. Darville.

"There may be others," Morley answered, hurriedly burying his letter to Penelope. "May I just . . . ? M'yes . . ."

He turned away to keep his face from being seen and pretended to look for a letter-opener. The top envelope was addressed in a writing unknown to him, but the postmark was unmistakably "Silham". Was this from Penelope or her mother? Penelope, he hoped; but he would not be disappointed to find it was from Lady Silchester if it contained another invitation.

"Well, I won't disturb you . . . ," Mrs. Darville seemed to be saying.

Then he felt her lips on his cheek, the door shut quietly and he was alone. "*Dear Morley* . . ." So it was from Penelope! He stood up to lock the door, sat down again and at once stood up, unable to remain still. Absurd! His heart was beating so violently that the blood seemed to rush into his eyes and blur the clear writing before him. Until this moment he had refused to admit how much he was yearning to hear from her. If he would face facts, he had kept saying, instead of mistaking politeness for sentimental interest . . .

Even now that she had written, he had to discount her letter before he dared begin to read it. Of course she would not say any of the things he wanted to hear. She was a girl, reserved and with a tradition of aloofness behind her. As she wrote, some one from that herd of dukes and cabinet ministers had in all likelihood asked why she was so busy and, in all likelihood, she had spoken of an odd young journalist who had dropped from the skies into the midst of Silham Park. He was a fool to think that she would ever lose five minutes' sleep on his account. Why she troubled to write . . .

With an effort he addressed himself to the letter:

"*I've been so terribly busy, rushing from one house to another, that I don't seem to have had a moment for writing. You very kindly suggested dinner and a play, if I found myself in London, and this is to let you know—to my great regret—that I*

see no chance of coming up before the autumn. Agnes and Archie, on whom I usually billet myself, are letting their flat; and, now that I've got home, I rather think of staying here. When I'm in other people's houses, I never seem able to call my soul my own. Every one wants to 'amuse' me!

"Are we going to see you again at Silham before the summer's over? I heard from Robin the other day that you were difficult to get hold of and I hope this means you are hard at work on another book for us to read. You realize, by the way, that you're responsible for Robin's presence in London? Something you said to him made him feel that he was getting out of touch with things; and he has come out of his retreat to see what the world looks like after all these years! Another victim of your influence is my brother, who is following the course of study which you recommended and has formed the highest opinion of your judgement. We so rarely meet new points of view in our quiet backwater!

"I've just come back from a most lovely place where I suppose I ought to have enjoyed myself, but I couldn't help wondering what we imagined we were all up to. The first night I was there, my host led me to a little belvedere and said: 'There, my dear, is where your father and mother became engaged! It was in the year something-or-other; and there was a big party of young people. Christmas-time, you know, and lots of balls in the neighbourhood. Your mother and grandmother . . .' So he went on, but I really couldn't listen. Fifty years ago, then, it was the same thing! Parties being given so that the young people could get to know one another. In time they married and had children and gave parties for them. *And*

in a year or two I suppose half of the people in this house-party will be marrying and having children and in twenty years' time they'll be giving parties to bring the children together. It seems very hard work for very little result. Isn't there something in life beyond *the mere continuance of the race?*

"*It's a depressing thought for women, but the outlook for most men is just as bad. If we spend our lives mechanically continuing the race, they spend theirs mechanically growing food for it and building ships to carry the food and sitting in offices to control the ships. It's all much the same as a bee-hive or an ant-hill, but not so well organized. Isn't there something beyond? The religious people, of course, say there's an immortal soul to be saved; and the evolutionists talk of the higher type which we may produce in a few million years. That doesn't console me much for the part I have to play here and now!*

"*I suppose that's the reason I look on 'society' as such a terrifying prison. The thought of marrying and giving birth to children who will perpetuate the falseness and futility appals me. For you, of course, it's different. You're* making *something; and, if you make it well enough, it will outlast you. However, I can't imagine that you want to watch me hunting for the key to human existence! Let us know when we may hope to see you again at Silham.*"

4

The letter ended abruptly. As abruptly, Morley shut his eyes and tried to fix the impression which

it had left before the critical part of his brain killed the warmth of his emotion. Was his first, dominant feeling one of elation that Penelope had at last written? Or of disappointment that he was unlikely to see her until at least the autumn? Or of vague regret that he was compelled to think of her again when he had almost convinced himself that nothing could come of it?

Without answering his own question, he picked up the letter which he had finished five minutes before receiving this one. If he posted it now, he would have an excuse for writing again next day; and, as he walked to the pillar-box and back, he would have a chance of exploring whether she meant him to read anything into her statement that for him, of course, life promised something different. Was she hinting that she envied him?

"If she thinks that people who 'make' things are less futile than the rest, she should have married Allerdyce. This business of analysing life to an absurdity . . . I worked through that before I came down from Cambridge! Her people might well attack her with her own weapons and ask why it was intrinsically meritorious to marry out of her class, against their wishes, choosing a man of no means or prospects."

If it was the sheltered, "backwater" life that she dreaded, she would—presumably—escape that by marrying some one with his way still to make; but this would not necessarily bring her happiness. The trouble at present was that no one had yet touched her heart. This letter reflected the mind of a schoolgirl encouraged for the first time to

express herself. And yet, between the lines, one seemed to detect a note of appeal. . . .

From the front door to the pillar-box and back Morley went at a run. He had argued against himself with conscientious vigour and sense, but it was only fair that he should state the other side of the case. The last few weeks seemed to shew that he was not entirely unattractive to women; and against the "bitter opposition" which he always assumed from Penelope's family he must set the fact of their proved cordiality. *Was* it so fantastic to think that, if he ever attained Allerdyce's position and means, he might some day ask Penelope to marry him?

To be sure, her letter, on a second reading, only revealed a readiness to continue the literary friendship which they had begun so impetuously at Silham. If at any time in the last month any of her friends had said: "*I heard from Penelope to-day. She asked whether I'd seen anything of you,*" Morley would have known that she was thinking of him. Unhappily, the only person who ever mentioned her name was Allerdyce; and he came for news instead of volunteering it.

Morley paced irresolutely up and down the narrow hall, trying to get Allerdyce into focus. He was still in love, but whether he still hoped to overcome Penelope's reluctance he alone could say. Was he waiting—as she hinted—till she had seen for herself that she expected too much of life? Was he saying: "*As I've failed, some one else had better have a chance?*" On an impulse, Morley checked on his way upstairs and turned into the inhospitable morning-room where the

telephone was banished from his father's hearing. The desire to talk about Penelope had become suddenly irresistible.

"Is that Allerdyce?," he began, without knowing how to go on. "Er, Morley Darville speaking. Hope I'm not disturbing you. Er, you haven't forgotten you're dining with me on Friday? Good! Only a party of four, my sister and the Miss Welwyn whom you met at the Critics' dinner. . . . I say, are you thinking of going down to Silham again any time soon? I was told to choose my own time and I hoped I might pick a week-end when you were going to be there."

A short silence followed; and Allerdyce's voice, when he spoke, held a note of faint surprise.

"I always go for a week in October, but I wasn't thinking of anything before that. It's barely a month since I was there last time."

"I know! I shouldn't have suggested it if I hadn't been given a reminder. In any event, I can't get away immediately, but things ought to slacken off in the theatre as soon as August comes."

"Does Lady Silchester mention any dates?," asked Allerdyce.

"No. She told me to invite myself; and now Lady Penelope has written to ask if I'm coming before the end of the summer."

Morley waited with quickly beating heart to hear how this challenge would be received.

"I'm pretty well booked up for the next month or two," Allerdyce replied slowly, as though he were turning the pages of a book. "If I were you, I should go independently. Does Penelope say when she's coming to London?"

"Not till the autumn."

So Allerdyce had not been told of her movements!

"I should go," he repeated. "In different ways the place is equally delightful at all times . . ."

"Like you," Morley interrupted, "I felt it was rather soon after my last visit."

"Penelope wouldn't ask you if she didn't want you."

Trying to forget that he was alone in the musty little morning-room and that Allerdyce was three or four miles away, Morley tried to make his voice casually conversational:

"Rather hard to know sometimes what she *does* want."

"You might say that of a good many of us," was the guarded answer.

"I'm not so sure," Morley replied. "I have a very fair idea of what *I* want."

At the other end of the line Allerdyce seemed to be laughing faintly.

"Is it," he asked, "what economists call 'an effective demand'? Something that you can get without violating the laws of nature? Not like adding a cubit to your stature?"

"I think so."

An unmistakable sigh travelled through the night.

"Then you're luckier than most people," said Allerdyce. "And in all human probability you'll get what you want. Most of us are not single-hearted enough, you know," he continued pensively. "We want things without paying the full price. We're pulled up by scruples and doubts

which I daresay are largely sentimental. However . . . You wouldn't care to lunch with me to-morrow, I suppose? I could tell you definitely then whether I saw any chance of getting to Silham before the autumn."

5

Morley sat for some minutes, trying to determine whether he was intended to take warning from the odd phrase about "scruples and doubts". At any other time, the words could have been interpreted as a lament or a confession by a man ever handicapped in seeing too clearly the possible strength of his opponent's case. Of Allerdyce his own best friends said that he never had an opinion about anything: it might be that he envied any one with the power of making up his mind, even if he made it up wrong.

"All the same . . . ," Morley puzzled.

Doubt was a quality of mind; scruple had a moral connotation. Was he suggesting that those who knew what they wanted and went for it were lacking in moral delicacy? Was the phrase in any way inspired by their late brief mention of Penelope?

"I should have thought I'd worn my scruples threadbare in the last four or five weeks!," he grumbled. "Penelope seemed ready to be friends, but until to-night I've not hoped for anything more than friendship. I've not forced myself on her or tried to influence her. Good God, I can't even *say* anything yet! And until I under-

stand her a bit better . . . I shall ask Allerdyce, though, just what he means . . ."

When they met next day, Morley propounded his question before his courage had time to cool:

"I've been thinking over what you said last night. Are 'single-hearted' people so rare? Are they so conspicuously ruthless? Or is this scrupulosity another name for a weakening will?"

Allerdyce seemed faintly surprised that any one should give a second thought to anything he might say, less faintly embarrassed that he should be required to define his meaning on any point.

"I suppose it's all a question of age," he replied uncertainly. "Twenty years ago, one's colours were fast, one's hammer was sure, one's masts were of steel. As time goes on . . . If you care to know, Darville, the reason I first wanted to meet you was that old Uncle had pointed you out as some one absolutely uncompromising. He told me that you'd always meant to write and had certain standards which were unbending and incorruptible . . . I felt I'd been a little like that myself once. I wanted to recover the old faith, the old enthusiasm . . ."

The wistful voice died away; and an alert host led his guest into the strangers' dining-room of the Thespian Club and beckoned to a waiter.

"I'll have whatever you're ordering for yourself," said Morley. "You might put the thing more bluntly," he continued, smiling, "by saying that you wanted to see with your own eyes whether

any human being, however young, could be quite so cocksure as I seemed."

"But it wouldn't be true," Allerdyce answered with patient simplicity. "I always feel I come the old man over you, Darville, when we talk, so you must pull me up if I begin to prose. I believe you'll find, like me, that the more books you write the harder each one becomes. You know so much more, you have so much more to discard. People no longer appear as black and white. Every statement requires a page of qualifications. Well, I find—and I think you'll find too—that it's the same with life as with writing. The clean-cut decision, the brief 'yes' or 'no' become more and more difficult. If I remember rightly, this discussion originated over the question whether Penelope Brayle could be trusted to know her own mind. I should say: 'Yes! To a nicety!' It's the prerogative of youth! When she's my age . . ."

"But is this uncertainty the result of increasing 'scruple'?," Morley persisted. "That was the word that stuck in my throat . . . Are young, impulsive, cocksure people any less scrupulous . . .?"

The lines in Allerdyce's care-worn face seemed to deepen.

"I should only say that they are less imaginative," he answered. "I know Penelope has told you that we were engaged for a time. *I* can tell you that the thing I wanted most in all the world was to marry her. Or so I thought. She would have gone through with it, but I chose to fancy that she wasn't quite happy in her mind. And

then I discovered that the thing I really wanted most in the world was for her to be happy. Conflicting enthusiasms, you see! Doubt! Scruple! It's a question that you and every other man will have to answer when you can get what you *seem* to want at the moment, but with grave misgivings for the future: are you justified . . . ? All the blessings of the church won't absolve you if you've seized somebody who doesn't really, permanently want you . . . But I don't know why I should inflict this sort of thing on you!"

Morley glanced swiftly at his companion's troubled face, then looked down in defeat. It was odd that after all these weeks he did not know whether Robin Allerdyce was simple to the verge of idiocy or subtile to the point of devilishness! Was the purpose underlying the last of his many invitations to warn impetuous youth that it must look ahead? Or did he still imagine that, if Penelope were left undisturbed, she would become convinced in time that her highest hope of romance was to marry a cautious, kindly friend of the family, nearly twice her age, but with an irreproachable income and a welcome in all the approved houses? Was it irony or admiration that prompted him to congratulate a younger man on knowing so surely what he wanted and to predict that in all human probability he would attain it?

"He needn't think I'm trying to catch her in a trap . . . ," Morley told himself. Aloud he said: "I'm trying to keep the second week of October free. It all depends on the theatres. I should like to be at Silham at the same time as you."

"There's no reason you shouldn't go independently before that," Allerdyce assured him again. "If Penelope wants you . . . I feel she's going through rather a difficult time, Darville. Mental growing-pains, you know. Anything one *can* do to help . . ."

CHAPTER THREE

SISTERLY ADVICE

I

It was primarily to have an even number for his party at the Carlton that Morley had invited his sister to act as hostess. She, of all his immediate relations, did him most credit. As a secondary point, it occurred to him that the time had come to acquire an ally. It was idle to plan meetings with Penelope until he had arranged a place where he would not be ashamed to receive her.

"If Rose would only help, I might knock some idea of style into my poor parents' heads," he reflected. "After all, Rose must see something of life with that M.P. she works for. I can't believe she *likes* the devastating provincialism of this place."

As he dressed for dinner, Morley ran wearily through the criticisms which had been levelled at this, almost his first, venture in entertaining.

"The Carlton? You seem to be spreading yourself!" This from Henry.

"Isn't half-past eight *rather* late to begin?" This from his mother.

"This is going to cost you a pretty penny, you know. I should have thought you might

have found some less expensive place. However . . ." This from his father.

Morley had attempted no reply. In part he did not want to fan a controversy that might easily extend to embrace the question whether Miss Dora Welwyn, with her deplorable parents, was a young woman on whom any man should squander money; in part he seemed to detect a note of envy in the voices of people who eschewed restaurants because they were frightened of their fellow-guests, frightened of the waiters, frightened of the cost and their own clothes and the bewildering *menus* and the resultant strange food. Until a few weeks ago Morley too had been frightened, but he flattered himself that by keeping his eyes open he now knew how to order a meal and find his way about the wine-list and give the right tips to the right servants. If only the others were not so smug or timid!

"You'll do all right," he told Rose after a brief inspection in the hall. Mother, father and brother had turned out, as though her simple dance-frock had been a court-dress; and Morley had found difficulty in keeping the servants from being summoned to "see how pretty Miss Rose looks". "Have you something to give the woman in the cloak-room? Good! . . . Our parents make such heavy weather," he sighed as they got into their taxi, "over anything that doesn't happen to have come their way before! As children, we were taught that it was rude to stare, but I really think we might turn round and say that it's ill-bred to gape. And they *do* gape, you know, at the most ordinary things."

"So do we all," Rose answered, quick to take up arms for the family, "but they're more honest about it."

"I'm not conscious that *I* . . . ," Morley began stiffly.

"My dear, *you* gape privately and then pretend you *haven't* gaped, and finally gape *again* because there are still a few people left gaping at the things you gave up gaping at fully twenty-four hours earlier."

"Really? Well, it's always salutary to see ourselves as others see us."

His sister's bluntness bruised him through armour that turned the keenest thrusts of his father and brother.

"It's true, though, isn't it?," Rose persisted. "Before you went to that place where I had to send your clothes after you, you never dreamt of demanding a bath before dinner or calling it high-tea when you dined at seven. And you used to like cocktails until some one told you that they spoilt your palate for wine. You didn't think of that for yourself, I know . . ."

Morley achieved a smile that was intended to express imperturbability.

"Quite right! I'm prepared to learn, you see. Unlike our excellent parents, who haven't discovered any difference in the taste of claret when it's carried over from one meal to another. But—thank God!—I'm not so suburban as to make a song and dance when somebody points it out to me."

"I suppose we *are* suburban," Rose murmured indifferently. "Regent's Park . . ."

"It's not a thing to brag about."

"Nor to be ashamed of."

"Unless it affects your outlook. I submit that we should aim at being perfectly at ease, in mind and behaviour, whatever company we find ourselves in. If you gape, equally if you sneer or frown . . . Hullo, here we are!"

2

As he got rid of his hat and coat, Morley espied Dora sitting by herself in the lounge and wondered apprehensively whether she could be trusted to behave herself properly. When he invited her, with just that air of carelessness which he wanted to see Rose and the others adopting, she had cried out with exasperating facetiousness:

"The Carlton? Lumme, you *are* going it, Morley! Do I say 'Your Grace' or just 'Duchess' when I'm introduced?"

She was inconspicuously dressed, he was relieved to see, though—as always—she was noticeably over-scented; and her street-arab vein of pert mockery, however much she promised herself to indulge it later, was lying dormant as she engaged in an exchange of prim trivialities with Rose. When Allerdyce arrived, she was disarmed by his remembering that he had driven her home from the Critics' dinner.

"You heard what happened after we'd dropped you that night?," he enquired, as they shook hands. "I carried Darville right down to Wiltshire!"

"He didn't tell me where it was . . . ," Dora began.

"I've ordered sherry for you and me, Allerdyce," Morley interposed before either of the girls could ask with whom they had stayed. "I know you don't touch cocktails. Well, it was great luck finding you free. This is my one disengaged night for about three weeks. There have been so many failures in the theatres lately that there's a whole crop of new plays coming on."

"I often wonder whether managers couldn't have their plays read over to a representative audience before putting 'em into rehearsal," said Allerdyce. "Time and again I've been to first nights of things that never had the faintest chance of success."

"They maintain," Morley answered, "that you can never tell for certain till you've tried your play on an ordinary audience. I'm not prepared to accept that . . ."

He began to lead the way into the restaurant, well satisfied with his handling of the preliminaries. How much easier, if people would only see it, life became when they forgot to be self-conscious! Allerdyce had taken his conversational cue; and they now passed to their table, occasionally bowing to friends and talking as though they dined here every night of the week. *Menus* were placed in their hands, a bottle was presented for Morley's inspection; and he explained how long he wished it to remain on the ice. No fuss, no awkwardness! He glanced at his sister and wondered whether she was comparing this scene with the annual dinner to which their father took them on

Christmas Day. A Victorian hotel—all horsehair and plush—, a dowdy cluster of relations, nervous talk of the weather, an embarrassed parade to their table; then much perplexed arguing about food and shame-faced whisperings with the wine-waiter; finally a sigh of relief, general staring and occasionally an excited murmur: "Oh, do you see? George and Emily!" As though there were anything wonderful in recognizing or being recognized in a restaurant! Morley had already exchanged greetings with three parties and was now receiving a bow from Archie Menteith.

"I believe the last time we dined together . . . ," he began to Dora.

"That dinner at the 'Bleeding Heart'," she murmured. "Five, six weeks ago? How's the new book getting on? I suppose you're here to collect copy."

Since she was dining as his guest, Morley felt that Dora might have spared him this hint that they were meeting in an unfamiliar element. Because he had taken her in the past to Soho, there was no reason—when they had time to dress and did not want simply to talk of books and plays—why they should not come to a place like this. Even if he had sometimes jeered at the "rich Philistines" who lived for their clothes and food, they were no worse than Philistines of moderate means, like most of the men whom she allowed to pay for her.

"My dear, that was really not worthy of you," he protested. "Only people with no knowledge how books are written imagine that a novelist is eternally taking notes and that, if he turns up

at the Grand National, it's solely to pick up technical terms."

Dora glanced round the restaurant; and the corners of her mouth curled.

"But, if you don't know, you must begin to find out some time."

"I don't believe in mixing work and pleasure. I chose this place because I think it gives you some of the best cooking in London."

"And you really find all this amusing?"

Morley looked at her in affected perplexity.

"Really find *what* amusing?," he asked.

"The whole outfit," she answered impatiently. "Lunching in 'smart' houses, dining in 'smart' restaurants. You were always so scornful of the people who had only birth or money in their favour. The fools who read about them and the snobs who wrote about them . . ."

"I get no pleasure from meeting the half-witted, rich *or* poor," Morley broke in. "And I like meeting intelligent people even if they have handles to their names. It's only the class-conscious that I really abominate. The man whose self-respect is hurt by dining in a tweed suit and the man whose self-respect is hurt by putting on evening things . . . Good heavens, what do these things matter?"

"But, if you had to choose," Dora interposed swiftly, "you'd go every time for society, with a capital S . . ."

"Has any one ever thought of spelling it that way except Oscar Wilde and Marcel Proust? If you mean that I prefer a good accent to a bad one, a well-served dinner to a scramble . . ."

"Good clothes to bad, diamonds to paste," Dora added. "Glamour, with a capital G, however you spell 'society'. This interests me enormously, Morley! I wish I knew what had made you swing round. Have you shared a guard's van with a belated duke or something?"

"To the best of my knowledge and belief, I've never even set eyes on one. It may come, of course. I don't abandon hope lightly . . ."

3

Dora laughed; but her eyes—Morley thought—were disquietingly earnest with purpose. "*I've lost you,*" they seemed to be saying, "*but I mean to get you back. Anyway I'm going to find out* why *you're trying to slip away. Have you found some one prettier, better dressed? It was my body, more than my clothes, that you were thinking about only a few weeks ago. Have you become a climber, bowing to all these smart people? Or have you been vamped by a Bright Young Thing with a bare back and a drawl?*"

Dora might not be in love with him; but she was determined, he felt, not to let him pick her up one day and toss her aside the next. Whenever he bowed to a friend, she turned with hostile possessiveness.

"I hope you endorse my opinion of the cooking here," he said, as a duck was proffered for his approval.

"Oh, I never think about what I'm eating," she answered, as though determined not to be

infected with his elegant new interest in the speech and clothes and food of the rich. "If I did, I should never be able to keep down the foul decoctions I make for myself. You've been mugging up gastronomy with your other polite accomplishments?"

Morley glanced covertly to see if this taunt had carried to Rose. It belonged to the same family as her own deflating reminder that he had not discovered the deleterious effect of cocktails on the palate until it was pointed out to him by one of his new artists in life.

"I was born greedy," he answered.

The reply at least carried to Allerdyce, who emerged from his duologue with Rose as though he had become suddenly conscious that he had been neglecting his other neighbour.

"How few of us, Darville, would have had the moral courage to make that boast when I was your age!," he exclaimed. "And what an arid desert London used to be for an epicure! Before the opening of these big restaurant hotels, you had Verrey's and the Café Royal and Simpson's—chiefly for men—, but the food and wine elsewhere beggar belief. A change came with Kettner's and the development of Soho . . ."

As he embarked on a history of the eating-houses and night clubs of his undergraduate days, Rose turned to Morley with a glowing smile of happiness.

"I *am* enjoying myself!," she whispered. "It was sweet of you to include me."

"It's a very ordinary dinner," Morley felt obliged to protest.

"For you, perhaps. Tell me who these people are."

With one eye on Dora to see that she was behaving herself, Morley gratified his sister's curiosity to the extent of a dozen names and as many brief, defamatory life-stories. He was pleased with his party as a whole and especially pleased with Rose. It would do no harm for word to reach Silham Park that he had some quite presentable "belongings"; and, the more Rose enjoyed herself here, the less she would be able to tolerate the admitted suburbanism of Albany Terrace. A girl who could hold her own in a place like this, with a man like Allerdyce . . .

Would the intimacy, Morley broke off to wonder, go any farther? If Allerdyce abandoned hope of Penelope, would he look elsewhere? The business of being in love did not begin or end with an infatuation for a given person. One started with a vague physical restlessness and dissatisfaction, as Morley himself had started a month or two earlier when the first spring flowers reminded him that he was now nine-and-twenty. One then inclined towards any one who promised fulfilment and peace, as he—for a moment before meeting Penelope—had inclined towards Dora. And, however ethereal one's feelings when one fell in love instead of simply having one's desires stirred, one lived in a condition of high nervous excitement for months or perhaps years. How long *was* it that Allerdyce had been writing his "novels of frustration"? And, when one was convinced at last—as one would have to be, if the girl married somebody else—, one was left

stranded. It was easy to understand why men and women who were disappointed of the love they wanted so often married "on the recoil". He himself . . .

What a ghastly tangle it all was! Of the four people at this small table, one man wanted to marry a girl who did not want to marry him, one girl wanted a man who did not want her! The two men wanted the same girl; and maybe the girl did not want either of them. Meanwhile, these two girls did not seem to be wanted by anybody . . .

"At present. If Allerdyce gave up hope . . . ?," Morley speculated.

His matchmaking was interrupted by an exclamation from the man whose destiny he was trying to shape.

"Oh, but, Miss Welwyn, you haven't lived! Spanish ham will be a new emotion to you and will probably change the whole of your outlook. I shall make myself responsible for introducing you. Miss Darville? I want you and your brother and Miss Welwyn to arrange a night for dining with me and having an orgy of Spanish ham. You know the Blue Grotto? I believe I'm still a member. Now, what's a good night for you all?"

Morley took good time before answering. While Rose danced with Allerdyce, he himself would have to spend most of the evening with Dora. Was this the purpose of the invitation? They were known to be working for the same paper, they had been together at the Critics' dinner and they were again together now. Would this

party be described at Silham, say, as consisting of "*Morley Darville and his sister—quite a nice girl, by the way—and the rather common little oddity that he seems to take about with him everywhere*"?

"You wouldn't like to go on to the Blue Grotto when we leave here?," he asked. If they arranged another night, it would only postpone once more the lingering death of his uneasy alliance with Dora. "I don't suppose these young women will mind a late night once in a way."

"*I* should *love* it," answered Dora. "It's so intriguing to see Morley on his native heath! If you only knew him at the office, you'd never dream what a social butterfly he was. I don't want to miss anything! High life, low life . . . I suppose you couldn't include an opium-den in Limehouse? Well, another night, perhaps, but I should like to see him being *really* abandoned. Full speed ahead to the half-world!"

4

If Allerdyce had not already left to telephone for a table, Morley would have suggested that another evening might after all be better; and he would then have taken good care that any night which was convenient for Dora should be inconvenient for him.

"Never *again!*," he told himself.

Like the underbred of all races, Dora was struggling against her own sense of inferiority by ridiculing whatever was unfamiliar to her. If in fact she had never before dined with decent people

in a decent place, the obvious explanation was that any one who could afford Carlton prices could also afford something rather more choice than her society. This, however, was no excuse for trying to make them all play the part of country cousin.

"I hope the Blue Grotto won't disappoint you," he told her vindictively. "If you're expecting raids and private orgies and corrupt police-inspectors . . ."

"I don't quite know what I *am* expecting," answered Dora. "You've been so full of surprises lately. Whatever it's like, I shall be tremendously interested. I want to find out just what it *is* . . ."

The sentence was left unfinished as Allerdyce returned to say that his car was at the door, but Morley felt that he would have no difficulty in finishing it for her. "*What is it that you* see *in this 'society' crowd ?*," she wanted to ask. "*What fun do you get from chasing about to night-clubs ? If you* belonged *there, if you had the money to run level with the people who* do, *I could understand it. Why have you suddenly dropped me for this kind of outfit ?*"

"All ready?," Morley asked.

They drove to a vaulted cellar off Golden Square and followed Allerdyce to a table already set with champagne and the famous Spanish ham that was the goal of their adventure. While Rose looked in mild wonder at the decoration of blue stalactites and improbable conches, Morley sat down to finish his cigar and watch Allerdyce dancing with Dora. He did not seem to be enjoying himself much; and, when the music stopped, he returned hurriedly

to the table and prepared for an exchange of partners.

"You'll help yourselves when you want a drink, won't you?," he called over his shoulder as he moved towards the dance-floor.

Morley glanced longingly at his cigar and made haste to pour Dora a glass of champagne and to offer her his cigarette-case.

"Rather too noisy and rather too hot," he commented.

"It's not so perishingly respectable as the other place," said Dora. "Is this what you'd call the 'smart set', Morley? The half-drunk men and half-naked women that I always read about? It's all new to me. You, with your experience . . ."

"I've been here, I think, twice before," he broke in shortly. "It's amusing as a change, but I don't want to spend the rest of my life here. Can't *you* contrive to enjoy things as they come, without eternally saying how different it all is? You don't want to remain in one groove all your life, I suppose? Whether it's Hampstead or Chelsea or Westminster or Bloomsbury . . ."

"I want even less to force myself into other people's grooves," said Dora, setting down her glass. "Are we going to dance?"

"If you like."

Morley threw away the end of his cigar and stood up. The less he thought about grooves, the better! It was to escape the groove of Albany Terrace that he had played with the idea of attaching himself to Dora. Now he was paying the price. Would nothing make her see that he was tired of her?

As they began to dance, he divined why Allerdyce had been so eager to get rid of her. To judge by the flamboyancy of her style, Dora seemed resolved to live down to the reputation which she had quite arbitrarily given to the Blue Grotto. Pressing against him until he feared for the stiff straightness of his shirt-front, she seemed to carry out three distinct sets of movements, jerking with her shoulders, wriggling with her body and shuffling, tapping and clicking with her feet in a double syncopation of her own devising. Danced by a negress in an old-fashioned *revue*, to an accompaniment of husky crooning about an aged mother, cotton-fields, piccaninnies and the Mason-Dixon Line, the performance would have excited little comment; in a club, even such a club as the Blue Grotto, ten years after the war, it aroused amusement in a few and uneasy irritation in the rest.

"I'm getting hot, let's sit down," Morley suggested when the band stopped for a moment.

"Just when I'm beginning to enjoy myself?," Dora demanded plaintively.

"Well . . . Don't put too much energy into the business, that's all."

Yes, it was easy to understand why Allerdyce had forsaken her after a single duty-dance; and Morley surmised sourly that she was none the better for the glass of champagne which she had taken after leaving him. A cocktail before dinner, her own half—and a third of Rose's!—from a bottle of Clicquot and then a double *crème-de-menthe* was not a bad allowance for a young woman who normally drank nothing stronger than tea. Her

cheeks were flushed, her eyes shining. If she saw any one dancing extravagantly, she was urged to greater extravagance; and, when the band-leader broke into song, she insisted on joining in.

"*Gee! I'd like to see you looking swell, Baby* . . ."

"You'll be thrown out, if you aren't careful," Morley warned her.

"Tum-tee-tum-tee-tum-tee-tum-tee-tum," she continued impenitently. "You're not what I should call a *cheerful* companion, Morley . . . '*I can't give you anything but love*'. Well, it's something to be able to give that! Most of the women here look as if they'd take anything you could offer them, but I doubt if they'd give much in exchange. Damned gold-diggers . . ."

5

THE next time that the music stopped, Morley announced that he was going to sit down. Without waiting to be asked, Dora filled her glass and called for a cigarette. While he was feeling for a match, she bent forward and lighted her cigarette from his, stroking his cheek the while, then curled her feet under her, shook her hair from her eyes and leant comfortably against his shoulder.

"I feel most 'traordinarily sleepy," she muttered with a perceptible blurring of diction. "Wonder how I'm going to get home from here."

Morley propped her upright and looked round to see if they were being watched. In imagination he could hear this party being discussed by cool

and contemptuous voices which ultimately reached the conclusion that a man might be known by the company he kept. "*It's her affair*," some one would say, "*if she likes to drink more than she can carry ; and it's his, if he chooses to consort with people of that kind. What he has* no *right to do, though, is to inflict creatures like that on his friends, not to mention his own sister . . .*"

"Perhaps Mr. Allerdyce will send you in his car." Morley's gathering clouds of exasperation were intensified by the discovery that, when Dora most offended him, she still contrived to attract him. Sprawling there with half her meagre body exposed, she disturbed him by the very completeness of her abandonment. It would be a delightful revenge if he could get rid of her at his friend's expense! One duty-dance was not an equitable share of their common burden. And it would be interesting to see whether the chill, fastidious Allerdyce would be stirred by her wanton air of invitation. "If not," he continued, "you'll have no difficulty in getting a taxi."

As the others came to the table, Morley whispered to his sister that it was time for them to return home; and so determined was his manner that they were half-way to Albany Terrace before Rose thought to ask why it had been necessary to leave so early.

"I didn't want to outstay my welcome," he answered.

"I think Mr. Allerdyce was enjoying himself. *I* was, certainly."

"And you had a great success with him, my dear. I'm not sure that he took altogether kindly

to Dora, but perhaps he was in a hurry to get back to you."

Rose shook her head; and the lazy smile of recollected happiness became faintly acid.

"Perhaps he felt he was poaching," she suggested.

"But Dora's no preserve of mine."

"I'm glad to hear it, but she wouldn't have been best pleased if he'd kept her from you."

Morley bent forward to look at the clock and began to count the fare.

"I'm no preserve of Dora's," he remarked indifferently.

"She'd like you to be," Rose returned in the tone which she always felt constrained to use when she was giving him sisterly advice. "It would have been pathetic if it hadn't been so indecent," she continued, warming to her duty. "I don't mean only when she was mauling you at the Blue Grotto: it was '*Hands off my property*' the whole evening. You should be careful with that girl."

Morley smiled indulgently and opened the door:

"You can't say I gave her much encouragement!"

"That's where the pathos came in. She tried behaving decently at dinner; and, as that didn't cut much ice, I imagine she asked herself whether something more extravagant would fetch you. I don't think I'm easily shocked . . ."

So nothing had been missed!

"To be quite frank," said Morley, "I thought she'd drunk more than was good for her. She can't imagine any one would be attracted by her

sham airs and graces at dinner or by her 'smart set' antics afterwards. Poor Dora! I quite liked her at one time . . ."

"And now you're paying the price. If you're really through with her, Morley, the kindest thing is to drop her altogether. She'll get over it if you don't keep her going with little bits of hope. Every time you ask her to a meal . . ."

"Well, that at least is finished. This was my last dissipation. From now onwards I'm going to work day and night till my book's finished."

CHAPTER FOUR

EMANCIPATION

I

On the morrow of his party at the Carlton, Morley prepared to face a broadside of interrogation and criticism. As it was Saturday, the "bread-winners" could sit as long over their breakfast of kedgeree and minced tongue as they pleased; Mrs. Darville had finished her week-end shopping and ordering the day before; and Rose would probably not go to her chief's house unless he telephoned for her. The decks, indeed, seemed to be already cleared for action when he entered the breakfast-room to find the letters distributed, the tea poured and his father engrossed in the office diary. This, Morley knew only too well, meant that they were faced with the annual wrangle over summer holidays.

"We won't wait for your mother," said Mr. Darville. "Rose came in so full of your adventures that there was no getting dressed."

Though his manner would have seemed crusty to a stranger, it was the crustiness—his children knew—of self-defence, which he adopted as a weak man's armour against any one who tried to get him at a disadvantage with soft words. Secretly,

he seemed to be pleased that the party had been a success.

"It wasn't a particularly adventurous evening," said Morley, "but I think she enjoyed herself."

"Judging by the time you both came in . . . You won't forget to give me back the latch-key, will you? Well, to business! I'm taking my holiday this year in August and Henry in September. Rose tells me she can come any time after the House rises. Now what about you?"

As no variation in routine was suggested, Morley assumed that the usual house at Swanage had been bespoken for the usual two months and that his father and brother would, in blameless succession, play two rounds of golf a day for six days a week, with peripatetic bridge-parties of an evening and blank desolation on Sundays and in wet weather. His mother, who lacked the appropriate figure for such displays, would float in shallow water for hours at a time. Rose would be caught up in a hearty, mahogany-faced lawn-tennis troupe with brick-red arms and peeling noses. And he himself, unless he could desert, would be asked at short intervals whether he could not leave his writing and enjoy the lovely sunshine.

"I've a book to finish. If this place is going to be in commission all the summer . . . ," he began.

"It's not. The servants must have their holidays," Mr. Darville interrupted. "When I go away, Henry will stay with your Aunt Katherine."

"Then I'd better go down to Burnham. I may get away to friends for a few days early in October . . ."

"Any one we know? Well, that's not likely:

you've cut adrift so much . . . I suppose it's the spirit of the times." Mr. Darville sighed and drummed the table with his finger-tips. "Your mother and I have wondered sometimes if it wouldn't make for your greater health and happiness to have some place of your own. I need hardly say that we don't like separating the family, but I *do* recognize, though I'm not always given credit for it, that your work is of a peculiar kind . . ."

Mr. Darville found it difficult to go on, Morley impossible to begin. There had been no warning; and the surprise would hardly have been greater if Rose had announced that she was going on the stage or Henry that he was taking orders. "Some place of your own . . ." Emancipation from all the tiresome restrictions of Albany Terrace, his own quarters where Morley could assemble his own friends—some cottage in the country or chambers in the Temple—and a life of his own in which he did not always have to ask himself what people thought of his odd, angular relations: it was too much to take in all at once!

"I could certainly work better . . . ," he answered at last. "What it would cost . . ."

"I might be prepared to help you," said Mr. Darville. "We'll talk about it later," he continued, as his wife and daughter—still eagerly discussing what dress some woman had worn overnight—came into the breakfast-room.

Morley saluted them and lapsed into a bewildered silence. Had he to thank Rose for this?

And what had she said when she burst into their parents' bedroom? "*Oh, a* gorgeous *time, mummie! I must say Morley did everything fright-*

fully well. Absolutely *at home! . . . You know, he's in with a tremendously swagger lot. Sir Victor Somebody and Lady Agnes Somebody-Else. Mr. Allerdyce regards him as one of our coming men . . . I'm afraid he must find it awfully cramped, living here . . .*"

Had it been something of that kind?

2

And what had Allerdyce said to her?

The habit of inventing laudatory speeches for other people to make about him was a weakness against which Morley struggled intermittently; but, as he had not been told what they had said about him, he was driven to imagine it.

"*I'm so glad to meet you, Miss Darville. You know, I have the* highest *opinion of your brother's work. He's not had proper recognition as yet, but I'm glad to say people are waking up to him. The fault of his early manner, if it had one, was that it was too detached. I felt that he wasn't going about in the world enough to attain a broad humanity. . . . I wish you'd persuade him to cut his connection with this miserable paper! No man can keep steady nerves and a poised mind when he's dodging in and out of theatres, hurrying along Fleet Street with a pile of books under his arm. I speak from experience. Your father, if it's not impertinent for me to suggest it, should treat him as an investment. And I'm not sure that he oughtn't to set him up in quarters of his own. It's terribly distracting to live with people when you're immersed in work . . .*"

Had that been the burden of Allerdyce's discourse?

It was not the moment for Morley to remind them all of the misgivings which they had felt and expressed at every stage in a life that was, after all, his own; but in time, perhaps, they would admit that he had been right. Would they admit, though, that they had been wrong, or would his father take credit for accepting the inevitable? "*We saw a very long time ago that we had hatched out a duckling. It would have broken Morley's heart to go into an office, so I waited until he had shewn his mettle and then set him up in his own place with his own money* . . ." Well, there was no point in being ungracious! This, as Allerdyce might say, was the reward of knowing what one wanted and going for it blindly; or, as Penelope would unquestionably say, the reward of being true to oneself.

She, when there was anything definite to report, should be the first to hear it; and maybe, when he went to Silham in October, he would be able to say that he had left Fleet Street and was indeed no longer dependent on his writing for a livelihood. It seemed almost providential that his father, of all people, should choose this moment, of all moments, for setting him free. Certain dreams which he had himself been dismissing as fantastic had within the last few minutes become possibilities. When he returned to Silham . . .

"If you've finished your breakfast," said Mr. Darville, "you may as well come into the drawing-room and thresh this out. You probably think you know your own business best and don't need any guidance from me . . ."

"On the contrary, I want your advice," Morley

answered, eager to leave his father a show of initiative. "I suppose the cheapest and quietest places are still to be found in the neighbourhood of Gray's Inn or the Temple."

A map of London was produced; and, while Mr. Darville dug among his bachelor recollections of forty years earlier, Morley considered what neighbourhoods he wished to avoid. The Temple, on second thoughts, was perilously near Fleet Street: he did not want Dora to drop in at all hours. Chelsea, too, was next door to Fulham. . . .

"I can carry on at Burnham for a bit," he told his father.

It would be foolish to commit himself now, if in three months' time he had to make all his plans in consultation with other people. Morley turned from the map and stared out of window at the dusty park on which he had looked out for the best part of thirty years. This talk of flats and country cottages brought one up against the sharp edge of facts! Did he really believe that he was on the threshold of a great career, or was he content to hear the flattering speeches which he himself invented for those who doubted his powers? Did he really believe that he was in love with Penelope, or was it sufficient to think how "romantic" it would be if he were? This at least had to be determined now. If he moved into bachelor chambers, it would mean that he was not in earnest about her or that he had no faith in himself.

"You don't seem to be taking much interest in this," Mr. Darville complained.

"I was thinking it would be better to wait

till we all come back in the autumn," Morley answered. "Many things may have happened by then . . ."

"You think you'll have set the Thames on fire? . . . I'll say this for you: that fellow Allerdyce seems to think you may."

"That's very good of him, especially as he hasn't seen a line of what I'm writing."

"What's your opinion of it?"

It was the first time that his father had ever asked such a question. Morley thought for a moment of saying that he could not judge of something that was not yet finished; but, even if it had been true, he found that he did not wish to say it.

"I believe I'm going to have a success," he answered. "I've never felt it before; but, if I guessed right in thinking that the other books wouldn't take the popular fancy, I may be right in thinking that this will. It seems to write itself! I'm going to work day and night till the book's finished," he told his father in the words that he had used to Rose a few hours earlier.

"I'm sure I hope you're right. In a few months you'll be thirty. I don't know whether you ever think about marrying . . ."

"It's not been practical politics so far. If I knew that I could expect some help from you . . ."

"When I die, I hope to leave each of you about two thousand a year. It was not my intention to anticipate that; but, if you wanted to marry and I could thoroughly approve of your choice . . ."

"I certainly hope you will be able to do that," Morley laughed.

3

In the weeks that remained before the end of the London season, Morley was to find that his virtuous resolution to work day and night was not entirely his to keep or to break. The new friends whom he had acquired in the first half of the summer were reluctant to spare him; and he was always making friends newer still who impressed upon him that, if he would go to one house and not to another, the inference was obvious and uncomplimentary.

"I understand why you bury yourself in the country to work," he told Allerdyce, as they walked away from a party that had not broken up by half-past three.

The conversation being wholly concerned with Wimbledon, he was conscious of having played a silent and inglorious part.

"The London hostess is an appalling vampire," his companion answered. "She has to entertain, you see, or be entertained twice a day for at least five days a week. The idea of a cutlet and a book by herself doesn't appeal to her; and there's a monotony in meeting the same crowd, meal after meal. If you can vary things with an aviator who has just flown the Pacific . . ."

Allerdyce was careful not to say "*a novelist who hasn't yet come into his own*," but Morley said it—privately—for him. In moments of buoyancy during the last few months, he had imagined Allerdyce whispering to his friends: "*Take it from me, young Darville's a man to watch*"; in moments of

brighter illumination, when he could not persuade himself that one in ten of the women who gushed over "Morley Darville, the writer, you know" had ever seen the outside of his books or opened the *Literary Review*, he still preened himself that he was being taken on his merits. When he held the table at Silham, they had surely not regarded him simply as a relief to their insupportable boredom? A party like this last made him wonder why his hostess and he wasted their time on one another.

"I don't feel they get the best out of their aviators," he grumbled. "They're so busy saying how *too* thrilling it must all be that they don't wait to hear—from the one man who could tell them—whether it was thrilling or not."

"My dear Darville, what makes you think they *want* to hear?," Allerdyce laughed. "They're only anxious to forget the open dullness of their lives. As our communist friends are always pointing out, about ninety *per cent.* of the population are overworked and underfed, while about ten *per cent.* are overfed and underworked. I sometimes think the underworked and overfed are the unhappier. Unhappiest of all, of course, are those few with active curiosity or an overactive conscience . . ."

"Like our friend Lady Penelope?," asked Morley.

"And without the knowledge or the will to change things. Yes, Penelope is a very good instance. She complains that life at Silham is draught-proof, sound-proof, shock-proof. If she lived in London, I don't know that an hour in the

same room as even Einstein or Freud would bring her much nearer to what she calls reality. She won't resign herself to things as they are; and she won't raise a finger to alter them. When all's said and done, she's of age, she has her own money."

"You think her dissatisfaction is all a pose?," Morley asked.

"Say rather, an example of the way in which people can entertain mutually destructive ideas at the same moment. Lovers of the natural state have sighed over the artificiality of civilization ever since there was enough civilization to sigh over; but, however much Penelope may talk about 'reality', she doesn't want the reality of short commons, insecurity and all the other things that keep mere boredom from the lives of people less fortunately placed. It's one thing to read about it, in comfortable chairs, after a good dinner . . ."

Unwittingly, Allerdyce's tone had taken on the angry bitterness of one to whom privation was still a green memory.

"Are you being altogether generous?," Morley asked. "I don't see her shirking unpleasant things . . ."

"Nor do I, but unpleasant things haven't come into her life. It's her *ignorance*, Darville, that one beats against in vain! And I'm so terrified that it may lead her to do something impulsive, spectacular . . . If she *did* give up everything to work in a slum! It's not the hardships that she'd mind, but the strangeness. A disagreeable accent, some strain of meanness which she'd never thought possible . . . She thinks everybody must be like her own people. For that reason she

needs to be sheltered from life . . . or else flung against it . . . Well, I suppose we must both get back to work! This lunching-out business *is* the most infernal waste of time, when you come to think of it, but I promised myself one season."

As he walked home alone, Morley tried to convince himself that he too was not wasting his time. In the beginning this social expansion had been so much of an education that, in looking back on the night of his arrival at Silham, he was abashed to think how raw he must then have seemed! He had not known—until he bought a *Peerage* which he had to keep locked away from his relations—how to find his way through the infinite ramifications of families that had been intermarrying for two or three centuries. He was ignorant what clothes to wear, what subjects to discuss.

"I don't need a great deal of coaching now," he congratulated himself.

No, whatever Allerdyce might say, his time had not been wasted; and his mild dissipations had not interfered seriously with his programme. Working late and early, in these long, light summer days when a man required but little sleep, he was already in sight of the end. His family, ever since they began to take him seriously, were leaving him in peace; and Dora, after her amazing display at the Blue Grotto, seemed to have discovered that he was not greatly attracted by her studied efforts in abandonment.

Thinking over their late conversation, Morley wondered what Allerdyce had in mind with his rather sentimental talk of protecting Penelope

from disillusionment. To assume that she would naturally lose her heart to some one who would afterwards shock her by misplacing his aspirates or forgetting to pay his bridge-debts seemed uncomplimentary to her and to her friends. What horoscope had Allerdyce cast for her? Behaving and speaking as though he had abandoned all hope of marrying her himself, he also behaved and spoke as though he could not imagine her marrying any one else.

"I suppose he thinks no one's good enough for her. I don't quite know why . . ."

On reaching Albany Terrace, Morley found a letter with the Silham postmark, the latest of many, but as exciting in some way as the first and reassuring in the cumulative effect of intimacy. Once or twice a week now Penelope told him what books she had been reading and invited him to explain technical points of style and construction.

"*I can rely on you*," she had written at the outset, "*to say what you* really *think*, *not what you* ought *to think*, *not even what* I *ought to think* . . ."

And now she plunged into the seven years' trial of Sacco and Vanzetti, demanding Morley's opinion of Upton Sinclair's *Boston*.

"*It has impressed—and* disturbed—*me quite enormously*," she wrote. "*At first I just simply boiled over with indignation; then I wondered whether* I *was in a position to cast the first stone. To begin with, are his* facts *right? How can I find out? If*

they aren't, *I should have thought the whole of capitalist America would have combined to annihilate him. Is Back Bay Boston afraid? Do the people he attacks think they'll only make things worse by defending themselves? This is much more than literary curiosity. In the days when the chief source of wealth was land, you had a personal relationship with your tenants and labourers. Now, when we're all shareholders in businesses that we never see, we cannot be sure that we're not underpaying our people or engineering a strike when it suits us or indulging in the sheer piracy that Sinclair describes . . .*"

Morley put the letter down and lighted a cigarette. Allerdyce had not been fair to this girl. It was easy to sneer at her for not doing anything; but what did he, what could any one, suggest that she *should* do?

"She's never had any one she can discuss her problems with. If a man twice her age is always saying: '*You'll think differently when you're a bit older . . .*' or '*Don't find fault with what you can't alter . . .*' *That's* why she and I became friends: I was reasonably sympathetic. When I see her again . . ."

He broke off to picture Silham woods in the first weeks of autumn, their light and dark greens turning lemon-yellow, burnished copper and scarlet. Penelope would be wearing brogues and thick stockings, a short tweed skirt and a knitted coat. While the other men were shooting and Allerdyce sat at work in the library, they would roam, talking . . .

"I must get myself a plus-four outfit," he decided. "I wonder if they'll expect me to shoot . . ."

At Whitsuntide, if he remembered rightly, he had veiled his ignorance of fishing under a protest against blood-sports, but he could not recall whether he had criticized them as a waste of time or a lapse into barbarism. Lady Silchester, feeling no doubt that the sense of the meeting was against him, had rather hustled him off his tub; and he had discovered in the last few weeks that men who were ready to discuss the theoretical advantages of secularism or the nationalization of mines would drop "*The King!*" from their toasts before they gave up "*Fox-hunting!*"

"It's one of the few things they're militant about," he reflected. "Only the other day Menteith was grousing against some fellow who *didn't* hunt and *couldn't* handle a gun . . ."

Was this the kind of shock that Allerdyce had in mind when he sighed over the disappointments that Penelope was storing up for herself? Did he picture her explaining with hot cheeks that her husband was rather odd in some ways?

And yet, Morley flattered himself, he could learn as well as another man! If he had not, in the traditional manner, been sent out, as a boy, with his father's keeper, he could very soon find some one within a hundred miles of Saint James' Street who would repair the omission.

Before beginning to answer Penelope's letter, he noted the address of a gun-smith who advertised: "*Lessons. Terms on application.*" He must look beyond Silham. If he was to take his place definitely in the Silchesters' world . . .

"*Where, if you had your choice of all England,*" he opened, "*would you choose to live? I'm breaking*

away—quite amicably!—from my family; and I can't decide whether it should be London or the country, north or south. I need a quiet place; and yet I don't like to be too much out of things. I remember your saying that I should soon be covered with moss, if I lived at Silham. Do you still find it so remote? I met Robin Allerdyce at luncheon to-day and we were discussing that very subject—being out of things—in relation to you. He maintained that, if you'd definitely decided what you wanted and if you cared enough about it, you could move mountains or add a cubit to your stature. If at Silham you feel shut off from life, I suppose you could migrate. It's chiefly a question how much you—and all of us, for the matter of that—really value the material comforts that we've always enjoyed. If the price of escaping were to be the definite loss of many things that you now take for granted, would you be ready to pay it?"

Morley turned back to read what he had written and sat staring irresolutely out of window. This came about as near to a proposal of marriage as it well could! If the letter fell into Lady Silchester's hands, it would be difficult to convince her that it was part of an abstract discussion of modern social evolution; and he would háve no answer if she charged him with wantonly unsettling some one who was already quite discontented enough. Since when had it become his business to tell young girls, whom he hardly knew, that, if they were unhappy at home, they could always "migrate" elsewhere?

He added a sentence to say that he had not yet read *Boston*, another to tell her that he hoped to have the first draft of his new book finished by October and wanted her to give him a candid

opinion of it. The opening page retained its new, bold flavour, undisguised by these cautious additions. Would Penelope read it as a dispassionate answer to a dispassionate question? Did he want her to think him dispassionate?

"If I don't give her a lead . . ."

Signing and sealing the letter before his resolution cooled, he hurried down to post it. When it was beyond hope of recall, he thought of a dozen improving touches that he might have added and rushed upstairs to apologize for expressing himself clumsily. The second effort satisfied him even less than the first; and he destroyed it half-finished. Was it worth while to telegraph?

"And make her think I don't know my own mind? After all, I *must* go through with this sooner or later. You can only die once."

For two days and nights of growing misery he wondered what her reply would be, whether she would reply at all, whether she would have turned to ice by the time they met or whether his invitation would be cancelled at the last moment. When at length Mr. Darville handed him a letter in Penelope's handwriting, Morley waited till the house was empty before he could bring himself to break the seal. Though one could only die once, there was a wider choice of times and methods than he had realized.

5

At the first words, his heart bounded.

"*I'm thrilled about the book!*" So he had not

offended her! "*Can't you send me some of it to read now? October is still such a long way off. My opinion will be absolutely worthless, but you shall have it. You know, I've never been allowed to see a book before publication; Robin won't even give me a glimpse of his proofs. You must have worked hard to get it nearly finished.*

"*Dear Robin and his talk of adding a cubit to your stature! I could almost hear him from your letter! He's right, brutally right: you have no business to grumble unless you can say definitely what's wrong and what you want altered. I've heard it a hundred times from my poor father and from Aldermaston. It's the practical, masculine point of view. Somehow I expected better things of Robin. As an imaginative writer and a psychologist, he might have divined that the discomfort you can't locate is the hardest to cure.*

"*Talking of discomfort, I believe that the things we take for granted—as you put it—have entirely changed since the war. We were all blown so far from our moorings then that nothing material (over and above food, drink, heat, soap and so on) has remained indispensable. We enjoy more luxury, but we insist on less comfort. I could live very simply if I thought there was anything worth having to be gained by it.*

"*You don't tell me whether you've read any interesting books lately . . .*"

Morley's eyes travelled rapidly down the next page. Was this all that she had to say? The letter was friendly enough, but it could not be made to yield much encouragement. Maybe she wanted to remind herself what he was like. They had been together for less than a week, three months

ago! Maybe, as he suspected at the time, she was not yet interested in him or in any other man.

"If so, we shan't get any farther by writing," he decided. "We've both of us said how we look forward to meeting and what a long time it is till October. It *is* . . ."

Nonetheless, it was a shock—five weeks later—to receive a postcard from Allerdyce, saying that he would call at Sedge Farm next day. In less than thirty-six hours, Morley calculated, he would be seeing Penelope again! In less than a week he would know . . .

They motored down in time for dinner. It was a silent drive, for which Morley apologized in advance by saying that he had been working against time and was tired out. Allerdyce, lying back in his corner and occasionally fidgeting his pipe from one side of his mouth to the other, seemed no more disposed to talk; and Morley wondered whether he too, perhaps, felt uneasy at the meeting that lay ahead of him and was saying that in a week he too would know his fate. What was going on inside the fellow's head and why was he so friendly to a man who at best meant nothing to him and at worst might eclipse him? Had he some quixotic idea of finding a substitute who would bring Penelope the happiness which he himself had failed to give her? It was a charming thought! Served up in a novel, with the customary Allerdyce trimmings, it would carry the circulating libraries by storm. . . .

"I feel I'm indebted to you for this visit," said Morley, as the car turned from the Bath road for the last twelve miles of the journey.

"I advised you to cultivate the Silchesters," answered Allerdyce. "There my responsibility ends . . ."

"You told me that I should look back on that visit as a turning-point in my life. Remember? I've wondered ever since what you meant by that."

Allerdyce knocked out his pipe and began slowly to fill it again.

"I thought I told you," he murmured. "It seemed to me that you were living in too much of a rut . . ."

"I know all that, but why did you single me out?," Morley interrupted. "Any of the high-brow clique you say I belong to . . ."

"We rather took to each other, I thought, when we motored down that night. It seemed to me that, if you could meet people of another kind, of *all* kinds, it would give you a larger charity; and that would be the making of you."

"The redemption of Morley Darville from priggishness? I see." A laugh that was intended to ring with good-humour held a faintly cracked note of disappointment. So Penelope was not a factor in this equation! "That was all you had in mind?," Morley asked.

"What else? I rather demur, as you know, to the word 'priggishness' . . ."

PART FOUR

CHAPTER ONE

A LITTLE LEAVEN

I

MORLEY arrived at Silham with his senses sharpened to detect change. If his welcome were by a single degree more or less warm than he had a right to expect from the cordiality which the family had shewn him at Whitsuntide, he would know that they were facing an altered position and that he must face it too. All the frowns of all Penelope's relations would not, indeed, frighten him away if she wanted him to remain; but all their smiles would not help him unless she smiled too.

It was a relief to be told on arrival that she, with the other women, was resting before dinner. Morley felt that he needed time to gauge the atmosphere of the party. In externals there were changes enough to make him think he had come to a different house. At Whitsuntide they had spent most of their time out of doors, but now the house was shut and curtained against the autumn. Vast wood fires blazed fragrantly on every hearth; tall vases of Michaelmas daisies and chrysanthemums glowed in all the rooms; and, except for themselves, Allerdyce told him, the party had been assembled for

the sole purpose of killing the largest number of pheasants in the shortest possible time.

"Wives are admitted on sufferance," he explained, "but the non-sporting element has to lie very low. Personally, I find it a wonderful opportunity for work."

They were conducted to the smoking-room where a number of somnolent figures were grouped round the fire, sipping whiskey. The air was redolent of leaf-mould, wood-smoke and Harris tweed; and Lord Silchester's welcome lacked nothing of its characteristic enthusiasm.

"Glad to see you both!," he cried. "Now, what will you drink? Sherry? Whiskey? It's since you were last here, I think, m'dear Darville, that we've discovered a piece of Roman tessellated pavement in a corner of the home farm. I must take you to see it. As you know without my telling you, we're in the direct line from East Anglia to the west country. Early-British tracks, Roman roads, Saxon blends of the two all passed this way. I've always hoped to make a find one of these days . . ."

As the old man talked, Morley glanced out of the corner of his eye at the now silent group round the fire. Archie Menteith and Victor Winton had survived from the Whitsuntide party, but the others were strangers; and they seemed to be eyeing him with furtive curiosity until a moment of silence enabled Aldermaston to carry out the introductions which his impetuous father had omitted.

"Roman remains?," he enquired in a whisper. "You haven't wasted much time, have you? Well, we needed some one to raise the general tone."

"The last time I saw you," Morley retorted, "you were being more highbrow than all the rest of the party put together. Tendencies in modern American literature . . ."

"Thanks to you," Aldermaston laughed, "I had an unbelievable success in the States. They invited me to lecture on English taste in American fiction! You'll be relieved to hear that I declined." He pulled up a couple of chairs and gave himself a glass of sherry. "Well, are you taking a holiday now? Penelope tells me you've just finished another book. How long will it be before you get it out?"

"That depends on the publisher," Morley answered. "I don't yet know whether my people will undertake this thing. They say they've lost money on all my other books . . ."

It was known, then, to this trim, correct young man in the Brigade tie that Penelope and he had been corresponding, on the strength of a single visit four months earlier. Did any one see any significance in that? Or did the Silchesters take this, like everything else, for granted? For all he knew, Morley felt they might be taking for granted that he was not fool enough to think Penelope would ever look at him. For the last four months he might have been living in a dream; and, until he had seen Penelope, he would hardly know whether he was asleep or awake.

"If we're dining at half-past eight, I ought to go and dress," he announced, with a sudden feeling that he could not bear any more trivial conversation while his fate was undecided.

2

His room, he found, was the same as before. As before, Allerdyce drifted through the communicating door to discuss who should have first turn in their common bath-room.

"Well, as I'm half-undressed . . . ," said Morley.

He had flung his clothes off to make sure of being down ahead of every one else. If he could find Penelope by herself in the staircase-hall for ten minutes, five, two! He was in and out of the bath so quickly that, when Allerdyce called out, "Give me a shout when you're through," he had got into shirt and trousers. The hall was still empty, when he raced downstairs; and he saw in agony that he had only seven minutes until dinner. At the sound of every opening door, he could feel his heart pounding; and, though he turned his back on the staircase and pored over an illustrated paper, he kept looking up at the clock until the half-hour struck and his hopes fled.

"If I had *any* doubts, *ever*, about *myself* . . . ," he muttered.

A faint sound of footsteps was followed by a tentative "Mr. Darville? It is! So Robin brought you to the right house this time! I've been expecting to hear that you had overshot the lodge and were half-way across Exmoor. How are you?" Morley hurried to the foot of the stairs, almost forgetting his disappointment in the relief of hearing Lady Silchester's voice again and finding it unchanged. To be sure, she too might be taking

it for granted that he was not fool enough to imagine Penelope would look at him. . . .

"It's heavenly to be back here!," he cried.

"It's delightful to see you here again. You're looking a little fine-drawn. I hear from Penelope you've been tremendously hard at work on a new book. By the way, I think I shall have to follow her example and call you 'Morley'. You've been in London all the summer? Well, that's not good for any one. We must keep you out of doors and send you to bed early. Ah, here's Robin!"

Morley stood back, restored to peace by her twinkling kindliness, and watched a double stream converging from the two sides of the staircase. There was no sign of Penelope; and his new-found peace ebbed away as he began to wonder if she had gone to bed with a headache. To wait till next day, then to be told that she had been ordered to lie up for a week . . . He was turning, with the courage of desperation, to ask Aldermaston, when a wild scuffling was followed by the arrival of her dog, skating with all four feet pressed together over the polished floor. A voice called: "Stanley, you limb of Satan! Where have you gone now?" Some one answered: "He's here." Some one else called out: "Don't keep us waiting all night, Penelope."

After that, Morley's impressions became confused. He was belatedly introduced to three women whose names he did not hear. Vacuous, well-groomed men arrived, twisting small moustaches. Dinner was announced. Penelope, very slender and tall in loose-hanging cloth-of-gold, argued

passionately that, if she was late, it was the fault of the watch which her father had given her at Christmas. Catching sight of Allerdyce, she exclaimed: "You!," as though she had not expected him, and kissed his cheek. Lord Silchester interrupted a dissertation on medieval caravan-routes to enquire, as always, whether dinner had yet been announced; and Aldermaston asked if his sister was not going to say "How do you do?" to Mr. Darville.

"I haven't seen him yet," she answered. "Ah, there! How are you, my dear?"

Nine minutes only had passed since Lady Silchester's appearance; but Morley's nerve was gone and for the first time since he was a child he wanted to run away and hide. What he had expected he hardly knew, but he would have been little more disappointed if Penelope had failed to recognize him. A hurried handshake before resuming her banter with the detestable "Bobbies" and "Monkeys", who all knew her so much better than he did . . . His disappointment turned to idiotic bliss when he heard her say: "This side! You're next to me." Allerdyce, he noticed, was at the other end of the table between Lady Agnes and his hostess. He sat down with so audible a sigh that Penelope turned to him in surprise.

"Hungry as all that?," she laughed.

"A sigh is an expression of contentment as well as yearning," he answered. "It seems a *very* long time since I was here before."

"The house has been where it always was," she reminded him.

Morley remembered telling himself, at their first meeting, that Penelope seemed a young woman

who was accustomed to giving orders and to having them obeyed. It would have been wiser, as well as pleasanter, to accept her invitation.

"I wanted terribly to finish my book," he answered.

"Was that the only reason? Every one tells me you've become very social. I thought you had a soul above such things!"

It was hard to make sure from her voice whether she was jealous or disappointed or faintly triumphant. As a professional onlooker he had been very scornful of those who spent their lives in an endless exchange of meals.

"It's extraordinarily difficult to draw any kind of line," he defended himself. Then, in a phrase which he had worn threadbare throughout the summer: "After all, one has to lunch and dine somewhere. *And* spend one's week-ends somewhere, you may say! Well, I wanted to come, but I thought it better not to. Will this sound very foolish to you, Penelope? When I was here before, I thought you were all playing me several tricks above the strength of my hand . . ."

"Several . . .? I certainly thought you had a soul above bridge!"

Morley tried to smile, but he felt that she was not being very sympathetic. Perhaps, under her persiflage, she too was feeling nervous at this meeting.

"An intelligence below it," he answered. "It was a pleasant change, I admit, to be treated as though my opinion were really of importance, but in my better moments I asked myself what right I had to lay down the law about anything. If I'd had a single piece of good work to my credit . . .

Now I've done something that does really rather please me. I'm prepared to be judged by it. Whether it will please you . . ."

"I'm *longing* to read it!," Penelope exclaimed with something like her old enthusiasm: "Of course I shall like it! And of course it's going to do marvellously! It must be so *wonderful* to have your first great success . . ."

"The book's not published yet!," he laughed. "As for success . . ."

How wonderful that would be, Morley felt, he alone could measure. If he could give Penelope, who had inspired this book, something worthy of her . . .

"I adore counting my chickens before they're hatched!," she was saying, with the slightly feverish animation which her jocular young sporting friends seemed to have introduced. "Every year I decide what I shall do when I've won the Calcutta sweep. Now, let's assume, my dear, that this book is going to have *all* the success I wish it! Whether you'll continue to know me . . ."

It was time, Morley decided, to make her talk seriously.

"Have you forgotten our bargain?," he asked.

3

Penelope flushed faintly and avoided his eyes. The "bargain", clinched in a moment of midnight excitement, was that success should not make him smug and that social heterodoxy should not frighten her away.

"Everything's bound to be different," she answered, "if you suddenly blossom out into a best-seller. . . . You'll have to give an immense dinner, by the way, to all your friends. After that . . . Mustn't you have a rich car and a villa in the south of France? I really don't know! Robin used to invest every penny he made. *So* characteristic! I can't think *what* you'd do, Morley! It wouldn't amuse you to disguise yourself as a profiteer; and, so long as the last meal isn't too far away, I always imagine you're quite indifferent to the future. Or to anything else, for the matter of that, except your work."

Morley smiled with an indulgence that was destined as much for himself as for her:

"You believe that's true of any one?"

Penelope looked at him as though she wanted to misunderstand his question:

"Of course I do! And in spite of Robin! Any one who lives for his art . . ."

Morley found himself wishing that her memory were less retentive. All that he had said about humble workers sustained by their white-hot passion for beauty was still as true now as five months earlier, but it was not easy to explain that the most devoted artist might be an ordinary human being when he was off duty.

"I should model myself on Allerdyce and invest every penny I could!," he answered. "Fortunately I'm on the best of terms with my father, who's helping me—as I told you—to set up an establishment of my own. When he dies, I should be well-off without writing another word. In the meantime, though I don't mind living on him to

some extent, I can't ask him to support my wife entirely. And I *want* to marry . . ."

"I suppose he'd make you an allowance," said Penelope. "Or if the girl had money . . ."

Morley shook his head and glanced involuntarily round a room that had been present in his memory ever since he last dined there. No parental allowance would provide the setting that she deserved.

"I need more than that. I want to have a house that will give my wife all that she's been accustomed to. I want our children to have all that she and I have had. It might not be possible to do all at once . . ."

"And it might not be in the very least what *she* wanted. Have you thought of that?," asked Penelope.

"No woman likes a sudden drop in her standard of comfort."

"It depends on what she gets in exchange. There's something to be said for freedom and irresponsibility. Why d'you think women—*and* men, Morley—sail yachts the size of this table and go trekking without the hope of a hot bath once a month? It's partly that they think the sport is worth it, but—even more—they're so sick of being waited on and fussed over . . . Now you must do your duty to your other neighbour for a bit. I think I told you why Robin and I broke off our engagement. He was threatening to do all you describe; and I felt I just couldn't bear that."

Before he could attempt an answer, she had plunged into conversation with Archie Menteith;

and Morley found himself at the mercy of a woman who asked him in quick succession whether he was working at anything just now, whether he dictated or wrote with his own hand, whether he ever described "real people" and whether he planned a book beforehand or just sat down and wrote.

"I don't think we've met before," she continued, without giving him time to reply. "Is this your first visit to Silham?"

"I was here at Whitsuntide," Morley answered.

"I remember! Penelope told me that Mr. Allerdyce brought you. He's a great friend of yours? I do *so* admire his books! How one man can know so much not only about his own people but also about lawyers, schoolmasters and so on . . ."

Something disdainful in her voice warned Morley that his voluble neighbour was a snob; something cautious in her attitude revealed that she had not yet determined his own social grade

"It's the novelist's business to know all sorts," he told her. "Or only to write about those he *does*. And the world makes it easy for us by throwing open its doors. You'd be amazed at some of the invitations I get from people who think a thing will be what they call 'good copy'. They ranged this summer from the investiture of a bishop to the weighing-in after the Leger . . ."

"So that, in a sense, you're at work all the time? Robin pointed you out to me at Hurlingham with Agnes Menteith. I asked who their preoccupied friend was . . ."

"I go to Hurlingham to watch polo," Morley replied with a touch of brusqueness. "Please don't imagine that I take a notebook and pencil into my friends' houses!"

"No? Alec Silchester's shoots are such grimly serious affairs that, when he told me you were coming, I naturally assumed . . ."

"That I wanted to study the literary side of pheasant-shooting?" For the first time since Allerdyce had looked on in faint surprise while a gun-case was stowed inside the car, Morley was unreservedly thankful for his late course of lessons. "I shall shoot if any one asks me," he continued, "though I'm a very moderate performer. No time! For that or half a hundred things. I had a most tantalizing invitation to go stalking with our friend Victor Winton. At least, I don't know whether he *is* a friend of yours . . ."

"Oh, one of my best and oldest! You know his girl? She married poor Lostwithiel's boy."

"I knew the son by sight at Cambridge. The present Lostwithiel spends all his time abroad."

"Yes. . . . Which was your college? I should think you must have been up with my son. He was at Trinity, of course. All his friends from Eton . . ."

"I was at Magdalene," said Morley. "As I disliked all my Eton contemporaries, I thought that was the best place for avoiding them."

"But, if you were at Eton, we must have an *army* of friends in common! Did you know Lord Kennett or Charles Wastdale? They were my boy's inseparables . . ."

4

As Penelope was still engrossed in conversation with her brother-in-law, Morley resigned himself to a dreary competition with his unknown neighbour. Whenever she mentioned an "old and dear friend" whom he had not met, it was a point to her, but she lost a trick every time that she led a title and he was able to trump it with a christian name or a diminutive. He marked the score with salted almonds and awarded himself the rubber by boldly inventing a deceased American sculptor and wringing from her the incautious boast that she had known him intimately.

"Who, what and why is she?," he whispered to Penelope when they met in the drawing-room. "Preeminently, why?"

"Mrs. Baker? She's the wife of the man talking to mother now," was the answer. "The boy just behind Archie is her son. If you haven't met her before, you must know her name. She's one of those odd people who get some satisfaction from paying the newspapers to print lists of the people who've lunched and dined with her. I'm told she's marked me down as a daughter-in-law; but, as Monkey Baker and I detest each other in a friendly way, I'm afraid she's doomed to disappointment."

In sudden illumination, Morley felt that Mrs. Baker's antagonism was now explained. She wanted no rivals for her son and would spend herself to prove their ineligibility.

He pulled up a chair and waited for the others

to sort themselves at the bridge-tables. Now, as at the beginning of dinner, he felt that Penelope—for reasons of her own—was deliberately keeping him at a distance; and he wondered whether she was venting her displeasure on him for not accepting her invitation in the summer. If she had wanted him so much that she was angry now . . .

"It's extraordinary how much time people waste in being snobs!," she exclaimed. "Mrs. Baker is the best amateur pianist I've heard. Not content with that . . ."

"How would you define snobbishness?," Morley interrupted.

"The frame of mind which makes men and women think they can increase their own importance," she suggested, "by associating with people that the world thinks important?"

"I see. If you had the chance of meeting d'Annunzio or Shaw . . ."

"I should jump at it! But I'd rather die than advertise that they'd been lunching with me. Lion-hunting and tuft-hunting aren't at all the same thing. However, one mustn't be intolerant! The world is big enough to contain even its snobs. So long as it amuses them . . ."

"And so long as they amuse the rest of the world? Speaking as what we agreed to call 'the professional spectator' . . ."

Morley was about to say that the satirist would lose an unfailing victim on the day that chorus-girls wearied of supping with dukes, or dukes gave up being photographed with jockeys. He stopped in mid-sentence at a puzzling change in Penelope's expression.

"Are you quite as much the professional spectator as you were?," she asked. "I couldn't help overhearing part of your conversation with Mrs. Baker; I should simply hate it if you of all people . . ."

"I was talking to her in the only language she seemed to understand."

"That I don't mind, but do you seriously mean to shoot while you're here?"

Morley forced himself to laugh, though he felt it was a little hard that he should be attacked for "having a soul above" the diversions of his company and, in the next breath, for accommodating himself to them.

"As I told her, I'll do whatever any one wants me to do. Isn't that the first and least of any guest's duties? I'll play bridge *now* if they can't get a fourth at your mother's table," he added with a strange, impatient feeling that he would almost like to escape. "I need hardly say I'd very much sooner stay and talk to you."

"I had an idea you didn't know one suit from another," Penelope observed indifferently.

"I don't pretend to be a good player, I haven't a card-head. And I don't pretend to be a good shot. I would very much sooner go for a walk with you, but if your father wants another gun . . ."

He paused in the hope that she would say they must have their walk, whether her father wanted him or not. Instead, she sat looking at him with the same faintly disconcerting frown that had been making him wonder for the last ten minutes whether he had unwittingly annoyed her.

"I thought you were against all killing sports," she said.

"At heart. I regard all sport as a great waste of time. I don't think it's important enough, though, to make a crusade about. And if a thing's good enough for ninety-nine people out of a hundred . . ."

"Oh, it certainly saves trouble to conform," said Penelope. So smooth was her voice that Morley suspected no irony. "I'm not sure, though, that you ought to begin a crusade unless you're going through with it. Think of your poor followers!" The frown deepened; and she looked away from him across the candle-lit room. "I was wavering about all sorts of things when you were here before. Hunting and shooting . . . I didn't say much for fear of being thought a freak. I'd seen how people shook their heads over Robin. Then you came along . . . I suppose I misunderstood you . . ."

"But what did I say?," Morley asked in bewilderment.

Penelope shrugged her shoulders and looked at him with a crooked smile.

"You did it very politely and charmingly, but you intimated plainly that for any one of the slightest intelligence our whole way of life was contemptible. I humbly agreed. *Now* . . ."

5

And this, Morley reflected with a bitterness that deserved the epithet "tragic", was their way of

spending the first moments that they had been alone together in four months! He was wishing that some one—any one!—would join them; and she was waiting for some one—any one!—to ask if he would not care to cut in. . . . Small wonder that Robin Allerdyce found her difficult!

"Penelope, with great respect, I think you're misquoting me," he ventured. " 'Contemptible' was never a word that I used or thought of using! The life that Archie Menteith leads is perhaps not the one that I should have chosen for myself, but would he choose mine? Live and let live . . ."

"But aren't you choosing it now?," Penelope challenged him. "Either you've changed very much in the last few months, or else I made a hopelessly wrong picture of you. I used to regard you as the only man I'd ever met who went his own way, lived his own life, spoke his own mind . . ."

As she looked at him with knitted brows, Morley became conscious of something in her expression that was vaguely familiar. So, he recognized in horror, Dora had looked at him that summer as she asked herself how and why he had changed!

"But . . . but . . . but, good Heavens!," he stammered helplessly, "is this all because I told Mrs. Baker that if I were *wanted* to shoot . . . ?"

"I can't imagine your even *offering* five months ago," Penelope answered. "Not that there's the slightest reason you *shouldn't*," she added hastily, "but it was rather a shock to me. Does it interest you to know that we talked about you for days after you'd gone? There was something so new

and fresh for us to think about. Your point of view . . . I should have called it the little leaven that leavens the mass . . . Haven't you noticed a change since you came back? We're surely not quite so desolatingly self-satisfied? And now . . ." She broke off and began to laugh rather unhappily. "Oh, why didn't I come to London, as I'd intended, and rescue you?"

Morley sat breathing deeply until his heart, which had suddenly accelerated, began to beat normally again.

"And does it interest *you*," he asked, "to know that, when I first began to be 'social', as you call it, I went about solely in the hope of meeting you? I simply couldn't face having to wait till October."

Penelope was absorbed in contemplation of her shoes.

"You could have invited yourself here," she reminded him.

"I didn't want to come till my book was finished. *Our* book, I *should* say. You inspired me with the ambition to write something worthy of you. I should like to have a success, for the reason I gave you at dinner. And, more even than the money, I should like the *réclame*. It would be something to offer you . . ."

"I hope and believe you'll have both," she broke in. "Will you be an angel and get me a cigarette?"

Morley stared at her for a moment, then sprang to his feet. She could not or would not see that he was trying to propose to her.

"Turkish. Virginian," he mumbled, offering her his case.

"Turkish, please." . . . She snatched at a

box of matches and broke three before she could strike a light. "And are you satisfied with the work you've done? So far, you know, you haven't told me a word about it."

"You can hardly epitomize ninety-thousand words and thirty years of life on a postcard," he answered. "I'm afraid you may find the thing rather gloomy. I believe, contrary to the general idea, that youth is the unhappiest time of life for sensitive people. We waste our strength and courage trying to 'find' ourselves, as it's called . . ."

"Would you call it a waste?," asked Penelope.

"Yes! You only find yourself when you lose yourself, when you merge in somebody or something. If you fall in love . . . Since last I was here, I *have*. You may find that explains a lot of things."

CHAPTER TWO

IN THE CONFESSIONAL

I

When he came down next day, Morley found it tacitly assumed by the knickerbockered throng in the hall that he would spend the morning in the library and join the guns at luncheon. He had himself fostered the assumption by breakfasting in bed and putting on a suit designed more for an afternoon party in London than for a tramp through wet roots.

The programme was explained to him by Allerdyce, who added that Penelope would shew him the way if he cared to walk.

"I shall drive, as befits my age and infirmities," he added. "If you're feeling lazy, you'd better come along with me."

Morley glanced out of window at the assembling sportsmen and answered that he would be glad of a little exercise. By themselves in the yellowing woods, he might be able to say things to Penelope which he had found impossible the evening before in a room dotted with bridge-tables and resounding with scores and *post mortems*. Perhaps he had been a fool to try, but the family made him so welcome and she herself looked so seductive in that dress

of shimmering gold . . . Maybe, too, he was a little frightened by the assured "Bobbies" and "John Willies" who had staked out an earlier—the world would say, a better—claim on her notice. And yet, was it a better claim? Their social and intellectual limitations were just what Penelope was trying to escape; and, however much they might follow her about with their eyes, she did not snatch her fingers away, as though their touch had given her an electric shock, when she shook hands with them at bed-time. In the last few months, Morley flattered himself, he had learnt to judge when a woman was physically attracted to him.

To be sure, she had not helped him much, but perhaps he had begun at the wrong end. Instead of building card-palaces—on the success of his new book—for her to knock down, he might more profitably have attacked her queer delusion that she was indifferent to material comfort. A very few weeks without her own maid and car, hunting for servants and worrying over household books, would convince her that there were compensations in the style of living which she now affected to despise. . . .

As the last car drove away, Morley entrenched himself behind a pile of books in the hall, ready to pounce if Penelope came in or went out. Allerdyce had withdrawn to the library; and it seemed hardly decent to pursue him with polite inanities when they were both waiting to hear sentence pronounced. It was impossible not to feel sorry for this tired, gentle creature whom an ironical destiny had marked out for defeat by the man that he had himself introduced into this house; at the same time

there could be little bitterness in defeat after all these years. If Allerdyce had been seriously in love, he could not have set Penelope free; still less could he have left her in mid-stage while he took up his melancholy stand in the wings.

"I don't see *myself* telling her that it will make no difference to our friendship, if she turns me down!," he reflected grimly. "Flesh and blood . . . I should have to clear out! My God, I never thought anything could get hold of you like this!," he groaned, scattering his books and beginning to pace up and down the empty hall.

Never again would he mock at the men who made fools of themselves over women! Never again could he slight the power of physical desire! As they sat talking overnight, he had been unable to keep his eyes off Penelope's bare shoulders and white arms; throughout the evening he had been tormented by the sight of her stretching up to kiss Allerdyce's rutted cheek. Until he could touch her, hold her in his arms, he would have no peace. And if he left her, still on fire . . .

Morley seized his hat and strode into the garden. He had not thought what he was going to do if he returned to London empty-handed at the end of this week. The cottage in the country, the chambers in Gray's Inn lost their charm when he pictured himself living alone there. Was he to continue being "social", as Penelope called it, no longer in the hope but at the risk of meeting her? Did he imagine for a moment that he could go back to Albany Terrace and the office of the *Literary Review*?

"I should be absolutely done for!," he whispered; and, as though she must surrender to pathos: "Penelope sees that, surely . . ."

2

BEHIND him, the front door opened and swung shut. He turned to find her running towards him in just such a tweed skirt and knitted coat as he had pictured her wearing ever since he had begun to dream of this meeting. One hand held a small hat; the other waved in greeting.

"Are you impatient to start!," she called out. "I saw you out of my window, pacing like a caged lion. How did you sleep?"

"Not particularly well . . . ," Morley answered.

"Nor did I," she told him rather breathlessly. "Your fault, too. I found your book in my room and I simply had to begin it. My dear, if it finishes as it starts, you've got a winner."

"I'm sorry it should have disturbed your sleep."

Though he had talked for weeks of wanting Penelope's opinion, Morley found himself wishing that he could postpone this discussion until he had discovered why they had been so curiously out of harmony the night before. And, instead of prophesying that the book would sell, she might have said that she liked it!

"I wanted to see what happened. If I hadn't known we had rather a heavy week ahead of us, I should have gone on till I'd finished it." She led the way rapidly, through a garden here

defiantly overgrown, there blackened with frost, to the woods through which they had walked in the spring. "I *should* like to see you right at the top of the tree!," she exclaimed. "You've gone so single-heartedly for this one thing. . . . If you'd like to know," she continued looking straight ahead of her, "that's why I attacked you last night for wasting your time with people who are really not worth it. You see, you're one of the privileged few who can choose the company you care to meet, the clothes you'll wear, the life you'll lead. You can be *yourself!*"

"You really think that?"

"Well, I'm quoting you. When Robin tried to make out that literary society just didn't exist . . ."

"I'm afraid he was right and I was wrong."

Penelope swung round as though she had misheard him.

"But you told me, from your own experience . . . ," she began.

Morley nodded and tried to soften her disappointment by sharing it.

"I'm afraid I was taken in," he told her. "There are coteries of self-styled 'artistic' people —quite undistinguished for the most part—who wear strange clothes and are sometimes rather unkempt and promiscuous and always very outspoken and intense. Quite in the Puccini manner. When you examine them, though, you find they're all following a convention, like that devoted young couple in one of Stella Benson's books who had to get divorced so that they might live together without being married. They're no more free than any other class of the community. Actually

they're more hypocritical than most, because they pretend they're free. It's a world of make-believe, Penelope, this 'Bohemian' world . . ."

"You didn't think so four months ago."

She would have liked, Morley felt, to say that he had not thought so until he learnt the habit from his new friends.

"I've come to doubt whether you can divide people up into 'worlds'," he answered. "I still say you'll find people like Orpen or Galsworthy who live for their art as a scientist may live for his science, but they don't get into fancy-dress over it or neglect their finger-nails to prove they're in earnest."

"And the political world, the business world?," asked Penelope. "They don't exist either?"

"Not as they're made to exist in books. Old Sir Victor Winton can't limit himself to the keen business-men who are running the country: he mixes them up with dear old ladies who wonder whether the heir to the throne ought to endanger his life by steeple-chasing. So with what people call Bohemia. It's not there, Penelope. And I discovered that when I tried to find it for you."

His confession made, Morley breathed more easily. There would have been a painful awakening for this girl if he had allowed her—on the strength of *Trilby*—to imagine that he inhabited a London Latin-Quarter in which (the day's work done) a painter summoned his friends to observe the progress of his masterpiece or a poet read his latest ode or a composer favoured the company with selections from his new opera before they all adjourned to the Café Royal.

"Well, you know and I don't," said Penelope after a pause. "Where *does* one meet these people? The painters and novelists . . ."

"Where are you safe from them?," Morley asked in his turn. "Every class may have its own conventions, but a touch of servility is common to all. If Chelsea is flattered to dine in Mayfair, you may be sure that Mayfair likes to dine in Chelsea. Head to head with The Great Man. Quite Informal. And, afterwards, Mayfair brags about what The Great Man said in confidence just as naïvely as Chelsea says what a sweet woman The Duchess is. Allerdyce will bear me out in that . . ."

Penelope kicked a fallen pine-cone from her path as though its light, arid uselessness were symbolical of Robin Allerdyce's worldly wisdom.

"I can't help thinking *rather* better of my fellow-creatures,' she answered in a tone which reminded him of Allerdyce's warning that she judged the world by the standards of her nearest relations. It reminded him, too, of the further warning that she would not accept disillusionment kindly. "If you're right . . . ," she continued wearily. "Oh, Heavens, how boring it all is! Robin always says: '*Stick to your own class*' and '*Only marry among people who speak your own idiom*' . . . That's just what I *don't* want to do! I was fool enough to think that if you found a place where people didn't *bother* about idioms and classes . . ."

She stopped abruptly; and for many minutes Morley dared not break in on her pregnant silence. She seemed to be whispering tragically to herself

that he had failed her. His reward for telling the truth!

"Allerdyce seems to have left out the most important thing of all," he commented. "I should have said: '*Marry the man you're in love with and let everything else go hang*'."

"In a world where servility is common to all?," Penelope taunted him. "You wouldn't dare marry your cook . . ."

"I should if I were in love with her, but I doubt if we should have enough in common to make that possible. I should hold out for community of interest rather than identity of class. But you *must* be in love with the man . . ."

Penelope tossed her hat in the air and caught it again.

"I wonder what you mean by being in love?," she sighed in the tone that Pilate might have used in asking what was truth. "Being in love . . . ?"

3

MORLEY waited for her to go on, but she seemed to be in doubt what she herself meant. They covered half a mile in silence; and, when she spoke, it was to apologize for her moodiness:

"You've given me a lot to think about."

Morley glanced covertly at his watch. In little more than half-an-hour they would be joining the others for luncheon; and, in her present capricious mood, it was likely enough that she would not give him another chance of being alone with her.

"I suppose," he ventured, "being in love is

the state of feeling that some one's absolutely necessary to you."

"But you don't die if you can't get what you want. I've always known that; and I think it has kept me from thinking any man indispensable."

"You feel you could never lose your head?"

Penelope laughed a little sadly:

"I've always wished I *could*, but common sense tells me that people *don't* die of broken hearts, love *doesn't* last for ever."

"If you'd ever been *really* in love . . . ," Morley began, then stopped for fear of admitting to himself that she was not in love with him.

And yet she seemed to be fighting against him the whole time, refusing to let him even touch her hand when they came to a stile.

"I should think differently?" She stopped suddenly and drew him with her eyes till he faced her. "I've been as much in love as I'm capable of being—childishly, idiotically, as a boy is in love with the reigning queen of musical comedy!—, but that doesn't blind me to facts. No one *is* indispensable. If fate has imposed some obstacle that you simply can't get over or under or round . . ." Her eyes narrowed, as though she were in physical pain. "And there's no kind of loss, however shattering at the time, that you can't face," she went on. "We saw that in the war and we're saying it now, which makes our elders think we're extraordinarily callous."

"The Victorians did so *wallow* in being inconsolable!," said Morley.

What all this had to do with anything that either of them had said he could not imagine.

Was she thinking of the adoration which she had offered Robin Allerdyce, when she talked of her childish, idiotic love?

"Not that common sense is any satisfaction!," she exclaimed bitterly. "Our generation prides itself on being unsentimental; but, the more illusions it discards, the more it yearns for some one, annihilating illusion! That's the secret of Robin's success as a novelist! Romance, which the whole world wants and will pay him to invent twice a year . . ."

"Romance which you would find at your feet, if you weren't afraid to let yourself go!"

Penelope's steady gaze wavered, but she threw up her head and looked him in the eyes again as though she had to convince them both that she feared nothing and nobody.

"I shouldn't mind if I thought it would last," she answered. "Our generation has been letting itself go ever since the war! And now we're beginning to see that physical intoxication—which is all you mean—has been grotesquely overrated." As though some crisis were past, her rigid pose relaxed and her tone became interrogatory. "Isn't that the reaction you'd expect? We've been over-concerned with sex, because our parents and grandparents drove it underground; but, when we've got rid of our repressions, we shall see it as one only of many factors . . ."

For all the good that he was getting out of their long-awaited walk, Morley felt that he might as well have stayed behind with Allerdyce.

"What a calm and sensible world it will be then!," he exclaimed.

"Alas, the calmer it becomes, the more we shall crave emotional disturbance! That's part of the general absurdity of life."

The trees were thinning; and, as they came out of the wood, Morley stopped and pointed ahead to a yellow ribbon of road along which two cars, loaded with baskets, were winding. His eyes asked her whether they must really join the others yet.

"We've plenty of time," Penelope conceded, looking at her watch. "If you're not sick and tired of hearing me talk about myself . . ."

"Why not sit down?," he suggested, pointing to a stile. "I . . . I'm tremendously interested in what you say. It's very odd, Penelope: you're one person when you're writing and another when you're talking. To judge by your letters . . ."

"You must remind me what I said," she broke in, swiftly standing on guard.

"It wasn't any particular phrase or sentiment," Morley answered lamely, "but we seemed to understand each other so extraordinarily well . . ."

"I can't pretend that I understand *you*," Penelope interrupted, to his discomfiture. "I *thought* I did . . . The awful penalty of knowing almost nothing about life is that one takes all one's ideas from books. When we first met, I made a *marvellous* picture of you! The dreamer of dreams, the artist living for his art, the rebel . . ."

She smiled as she spoke, in mockery of herself, but Morley knew that she was mocking him for disappointing her.

"I could hardly live up to a picture that I

didn't even recognize," he answered. "Nothing that *I've* said . . ."

"No, you told me there'd been no starving or struggling. I suppose it was my imagination. When you were here before, one against the world . . . You tell me now that the Bohemia of my imagination doesn't exist. There you *did* rather mislead me. What the next thing will be . . ."

"I'm sorry to disappoint you, but you and I are too old for games of let's-pretend!," Morley exclaimed. "You can to some extent decide what company you'll keep, but you must accept one of the backgrounds that society provides."

"As Robin warned me from the beginning."

Penelope's face became sombre as she spoke; and Morley was reminded of a phrase which she had used in that same wood five months earlier when she talked of his being summoned by Allerdyce as an expert witness. Most unfairly, she was making him accountable for the condition of the world when in fact he had only revealed a little of the truth about it; but he would be wasting time and temper if he told her so.

"Until you've tried the other varieties, you'll never understand how well off you are with your present background," he prophesied.

"So Robin always says."

In this same wood, five months earlier, Morley recalled that he had tried to break down Allerdyce's domination over her mind.

"He was right! I've been thinking and arguing about that day and night . . . Penelope, when do you expect to finish my book? I do so want to hear your verdict. If it *is* going to

be a winner . . . I've not bothered much about money hitherto, but I told you something last night . . . I don't know if you remember . . . Money and all that sort of thing have become more important. I personally don't care how I live; but, until a man's in a position to give a girl everything she's been accustomed to, I don't feel he's justified in asking her to marry him." Morley waited, dry-mouthed, for Penelope to make some observation, then added: "Do *you?*"

Before answering, she looked at her watch and sprang up from the stile.

"We ought to be moving on. . . . I don't think you can generalize, Morley. As a woman takes her husband's rank, she probably expects to share his material position. And certainly he won't adapt himself to her *milieu* as easily as she adapts herself to his, so this business of giving her all she's accustomed to may be rather wasted labour." Had he asked her to criticize the psychology of his new book, Penelope could not have been more conscientious or more impersonal. "If she thinks, like me, that all these differences of *milieu* are rather absurd, she may feel impatient with him for bothering so much about them. . . . I don't mind admitting I'm hungry. If you only have coffee and grape-fruit for breakfast, you find it's a long time to half-past one."

This morning, then, as last night, she was not interested to hear that he was in love, but she was keenly interested to keep him from proposing to her. Morley dropped behind to light a cigarette and followed at her heels to a clearing where the cars were drawn up by the side of the road.

4

CAMP-CHAIRS had been set at a laden trestle-table; and, as he began to eat, Lord Silchester called out to know where he had been hiding all the morning.

"Robin tells me you've brought a gun," he added.

"I thought I'd better walk round quietly first, sir," Morley answered. "If I find anybody even approximately as bad as I am, I may join you later."

"We're nothing wonderful, m'dear boy, except Winton here. That was a very pretty little display you gave us, Victor, at the corner of the Long Spinney . . ."

The conversation began to bristle with technicalities for which a single course at a shooting-school was inadequate preparation. Morley sat back with a sense of exclusion, contrasting this visit with the last. That wretched gun, those miserable lessons! Because he had learnt enough racing jargon to become an almost silent audience for Archie Menteith's monologues, he fancied that he could pick up in a few weeks the practice and theory, the language and atmosphere of a life that was not his and never would be! And these scornful, self-contained young men in regimental ties—the successors of the scornful boys who had ignored his existence at Eton—seemed to know it. Clustering about Penelope with their private jokes and allusions, the last thing they wanted to hear was a lecture on art as the end of life and beauty as the end of art. Even Menteith and Aldermaston had forgotten their earlier reverence and were looking

at him as though they felt he should be definitely one thing or the other. If they were in danger of being peppered by a writer-fellow, well, they would rather that he stuck to his inky trade.

Morley blushed to think that he had once held forth loftily to his sister on the desirability of being at ease in any company. He had been more at ease when he was "Mr. Darville" to them, a stranger in a flowing cloak and wide-brimmed hat throwing polite defiance to them all! Did Penelope have this in mind when she warned him that men were less apt than women in accommodating themselves to a strange social *milieu?* When she expressed her disdain for differences of *milieu*, did she mean that she despised him for recognizing them?

Old Winton, who lunched off bread and cheese, had carried his chair to a safe distance and was lighting a cheroot. Morley filled a pipe and joined him. Though he was still hungry, it was impossible to eat any more until he had analysed the change in Penelope's attitude to him. It had begun at dinner the night before, when she was unreasonably impatient with him for talking to Mrs. Baker in her own language. Did she really imagine that he was boasting of his distinguished friends? She would think next that he was glamoured by her title! Good Heavens, if one had to choose between making a name and being born with one . . .

Morley glanced back at the long trestle-table. That was the way he had talked once, but of late he had thought less about "the aristocracy of intelligence". To elevate the man-who-did over

the man-who-simply-was seemed defensive, as though he feared to be slighted. And yet everything about him *was* defensive! Why, coming down in the car with Allerdyce that first night, he had been careful to make known that he too was a public-school and university man! For fear that Allerdyce might not guess it for himself? Should this be called an inferiority-complex?

"I wish to God it could!," he groaned to himself.

Though he did not know that he was looking anywhere in particular, he discovered that his eyes were fixed on Penelope, who was talking and laughing in utter unconsciousness of his sullen scrutiny. So she had talked and laughed before he came on this stage, so she would talk and laugh when he had left it. An inferiority-complex . . . Why, everybody had one! People paraded their pedigrees because they had nothing else to parade. If it were no more than that, he need not distress himself; but he almost despaired of making plain to Penelope that he did not care two pins how a man was bred or where he was educated or what he did with such talents as God had given him. The important thing, for his own comfort, was that his surroundings should be congenial; and the vital thing, if he married, was that there should be no violent uprooting. That, surely, was simple enough? And yet, whenever he tried to find a common meeting-ground with Penelope, she seemed to think he was dazzled—like some Mrs. Baker—by the vision of big houses and old titles and similar Hollywood stuff. Good Heavens, he had fallen in love before he gave a thought to her

"background". If he could not adapt himself to it, he would give up trying; and she could adapt herself to him. Assuming that she wanted him . . . If she did not, he must make his bow. . . .

Morley forced his eyes away from her. He understood now his own cry that he would not have minded if his turmoil of spirit had been no more than a complex. If in truth he had been blinded by her prestige, he would forget her the moment after he had bidden her good-bye, but he knew that he would never be allowed to forget her.

"Is the distinguished author coming with us? Or is he going home to work?"

Morley glanced up at the touch of a hand on his shoulder and found Sir Victor leaning towards him. "*The distinguished author*"? There was no irony in the old man's kindly voice; and he felt his depression leaving him as suddenly as it had come. If, instead of accommodating himself to these people, he had forced them to accept him for himself and on his merits . . . That infernal gun . . .

"I told our host I was coming with you," Morley answered, "but I really think I ought to do some work. This sort of thing is all very well for those who have nothing else to do . . ."

He strolled back to the luncheon-table and listened to Penelope making plans. She was going back at once by car, it seemed, as she had letters to write; and Morley was thankful that she did not even ask what he would like to do. The affair had been seriously bungled; and he

needed time to retrieve his position. In trying to be more royalist than the king, he had thrown away his one claim to distinction without getting anything in return. Coming into the smoking-room the day before, he had wondered, with his torturing self-consciousness—as though every one must be interested in him!—, what kind of label the Silchesters had tied round his neck. Could they have said: "*One of these clever young gentlemen, you know. Quite pleasant to meet, even if he is rather a snob.*" That had to be set right. . . .

The first car started, then the second; and Morley returned by himself through the woods. On reaching the house, he went to his room and locked the door. Allerdyce would be in the library; and there would be stray, talkative women in all the other rooms.

"This wants thinking out," Morley whispered, only to discover that he did not know where to begin. "If I'm not very careful . . . ," he tried. "It's hanging by a hair! If I lost her now . . ."

5

SITTING with a blank mind before his crackling, newly lighted fire, he watched the early October sun setting. Gradually his room filled with shadows; and he looked with drowsy interest as the titles of the books became blurred, then lost and the sharp outlines of the furniture were blunted.

It was too much trouble to turn on the light; and, so long as he sat half-asleep, he could forget a few at least of the mortifications and alarms which

had been torturing him ever since he set out from Sedge Farm. It looked as though his nerves, never of the steadiest, had been strained a turn or two more than they could bear by the work and excitement of the last few months. When all was said and done, there had been no crisis. Penelope and he had indulged in one of their rambling discussions; and, if she insisted on keeping it impersonal, this—as likely as not—was because she felt the time had not yet come for a declaration. The publishers were still considering his new book! This was but their second meeting! And, when she thought over their talk, she would see, surely, that he had only said what every one else had been saying for years. When they met at dinner, he was fully prepared to be greeted with the words: "*I don't like to admit it, but I'm afraid you were right . . .*"

As he lovingly invented one of his imaginary conversations to bring her back to him, Morley felt that he could almost hear her voice; and, though his door was locked, he chose to pretend that she had somehow got in—maybe through Allerdyce's room—and was saying that she had looked for him everywhere.

"I want to have a serious talk with you," she was continuing.

A man's voice, answering, asked her to sit down.

"I came here," it explained, "because I thought young Darville might like the library to himself. He has work to do; and I'm only idling."

Morley roused with a start and looked through the shadows at the communicating door, which was framed in a thin square of yellow. So Allerdyce

was there the whole time; and they had each of them been leaving the library to the other!

"I've come to tell you, my dear, that you were absolutely right." It was Penelope speaking, in the words which Morley had invented for her. "If you like to say I'm a tiresome little fool, you may."

A faint laugh travelled through the shadowy room.

"I shan't say it, I don't think it. What's been happening, my precious?"

"I suppose I've been living in a fool's paradise . . . Robin, you remember when you urged mother to make Morley stay on here? At Whitsuntide? Did you do that as an object-lesson to me?"

"To you? Heavens, no! If you'd said, 'to *him*' . . . I took quite a liking to him, you see, and I thought you'd like him too. He was rather pathetic, I thought; so very raw and so very bitter. I felt that, if he wasn't to become a first-class prig, we must contrive to widen his horizons a bit. And I think we've succeeded. He's not so much the *farouche* intellectual from the Garden City that he was. In fact, he had quite a success in London this season."

A long silence followed; and Morley found his hands gripping the arms of his chair as though he were bracing himself to be flogged.

"I wonder whether *he* will consider it a success," Penelope mused. "I wonder if you haven't spoilt him."

"Well, he's shaved his absurd whiskers and got rid of his fantastic clothes. That's a definite improvement. Not that *I've* done much beyond

introducing him to a few people. Oh, I put him up for a pot-house I belong to, which was short of members. I imagine he has *rather* a dull time in *rather* a narrow middle-class home. There's quite a nice sister, by the way, though he doesn't produce the family much in public. What's been happening to get you worked up like this?"

"I'm afraid he's fallen in love with me."

Morley shut his eyes and listened, breathing quickly, as Allerdyce replied that he thought he could have told Penelope that some time ago.

"Not so very surprising, is it?," he laughed. "And I thought you had quite a soft place in your heart for him."

"I liked him in a way that I've never liked any other man! I do still. But I find he's as unreal as all the rest. Robin, he's given me his new book to read! It may *sell*, but it's the most awful shewing-up of *him*. Like a page of Debrett. In spite of it, I believe I'm in love with him. *I* don't know what's to be done! He'd have proposed last night, if I hadn't headed him off. And this morning again . . ."

The words ended on a sob.

"And you don't want him to?," Allerdyce asked.

"I believe I almost did . . . till yesterday. I didn't think intelligent people *could* be class-conscious! It's the most hideous shock. My dear, he wants to make a fortune by his books so that he can set me up in a huge house with a fleet of cars and ropes of pearls! *I* don't want *that!* He would be just like everybody else. And for one imbecile moment I thought he was different from anybody else."

Penelope was crying now without concealment.

"You haven't said what you want *me* to do," Allerdyce reminded her, after a pause.

Morley could hear her blowing her nose.

"I wanted you to tell me I was a fool," she answered miserably, "but you wouldn't take your opportunity. You were right! There's no 'real' world in the sense that I mean. Morley said so. And he was my one hope . . . Do you still want to marry, me, Robin? I can't imagine why you should, but you always said that, when I'd seen the error of my ways, I could come back to you. And I *mustn't* let poor Morley get out his proposal!"

CHAPTER THREE

LAST GESTURE

I

THAT night Penelope reminded Morley of her old-time engagement to Robin Allerdyce and tried to tell him that it was being renewed. She was thrown out of her stride when Morley interrupted her, with a tight-lipped smile, to say she could tell him nothing that he did not know already.

"It wasn't entirely my fault," he explained, "but I couldn't help hearing some of your conversation. I was resting in my room. I wish you all the happiness in the world, Penelope. May I congratulate Allerdyce? I mean, is it public property? You *are* going through with it now?"

For the first time in their acquaintance, Penelope seemed unequal to the demands of the situation. She had overcome her embarrassment when she invited him to what she called her "little book-room"; she had talked easily enough about the trivial events of the afternoon; she had even mentioned quite casually that she had looked for him before dinner, as there was something she wished to discuss.

"You were . . . in the next room?," she asked

blankly. Then, in an effort at recovery, she added: "That explains why I couldn't find you."

Morley waited for her to continue. As the rest of the cards in her hand were winning trumps, he could only look on while she rather unnecessarily played them out. As some one had just said downstairs, "*I must give you the spade. The rest are mine*"; as some one else had replied, "*I've nothing to say to that.*"

He had nothing to say when she told him that she was going to marry some one else; and he was sorry, now, that he had scored his one wretched trick by revealing that he had overheard her. It was not done to hurt, but he did not feel he could bear to listen, with suitable comments and appropriate expressions, while she delicately unfolded what was known to him already. He had no wish to hurt any one, nor—for the matter of that—to be gratuitously hurt himself. If he had to renounce her, Morley was determined to make his last gesture worthy of them all: of Allerdyce, who had once given her up, of Penelope herself, who had "headed" him "off" a proposal . . . There was not, he reflected, with a sudden access of weariness, very much else that he could do.

"I haven't told anybody yet," said Penelope. "I wanted you to know before any one else. For the last few months I've abused your patience so mercilessly with my views on life . . ."

"I knew without being told that you hadn't found quite what you were looking for. As it's too late now to make any difference, I can tell you that I began to fall in love with you the first time we met. No demand you could possibly make . . ."

The girl dropped her head and fidgeted with the fringe of her skirt.

"I should have driven you mad with what you must think my utter wrong-headedness! You'll find some one who will repay you for all your sweetness and understanding far, far better . . ."

"I shan't try!"

Penelope looked up, startled, and beckoned him to a chair:

"Why not?"

"Because I'm in love with you still. I always shall be. I could never be in love with any one else. And now, if you'll excuse me . . ."

He made a movement towards the door, but Penelope called him back.

"I can't let you go like this! Oh, you make me feel so terribly guilty!," she cried.

Morley felt tempted to reply that he was not greatly interested in her emotions. After all, she was choosing with her eyes open, getting—if not all she wanted—at least all she could hope to get in an imperfect world. It was for the people whom she left stranded to indulge, if they liked, in self-pity. Allerdyce . . . Had he felt like this when his long "frustration" began? One might have been a little more careful in using that derisive phrase if one could have foreseen that it would ever be applied to oneself. . . .

"You couldn't help being what you are," he answered mechanically. "Which means that I

couldn't help falling in love with you. We won't talk about me, though. I want to know whether you're really going through with it this time."

The repetition of the question brought a warning flush to Penelope's cheeks.

"I suppose you think that because I once didn't know my own mind . . ."

"I only want to be certain that you know it *now !*," Morley answered. "Your happiness . . You told Allerdyce, you see, that you thought you were in love with me . . ."

Penelope bit her lip:

"If you heard that, you must have heard me say that I was mistaken."

Morley was sardonically amused to observe that the quixotic mood in which they tried to spare each other's feelings had already worn thin. Penelope wanted to punish him because her own unflattering candour had been overheard; and he, no longer studying his gesture of renunciation, found himself forcing her backwards, step by step, as though he could not give her up if he wished.

"I didn't want to hear anything. I was . . . stunned. You said I was the same as everybody else when you thought I was different from everybody else. Well, I'm proud to plead guilty. Every decent man has to ask himself whether he's making unfair calls on the woman he wants to marry. How could I go to your father unless I could assure you the ordinary comforts of life?"

"And how can I convince you that all this business about living in a certain way is out of date? If you had any idea how some of my

friends keep going on nothing a year . . . It's no good! And Robin's just the same!"

"Then, if there's no difference between us except that you've never pretended to be in love with him . . ."

Penelope stood up to kick a fallen log into place.

"I've always been devoted to Robin," she answered, crossing her arms on the mantelpiece and resting her forehead against them. "I've known him so long, we understand each other so well . . ."

"But you told him that you liked me in a way that you'd never liked any other man."

"So you heard that too!"

The bent back grew rigid for a moment, then relaxed as she shrugged her shoulders in hopeless resignation. Morley stood up and came to her side. At a touch she must surrender! He had been right in thinking that she was attracted physically, however much she resisted him; and he was right now in pressing his attack. He laid his hand on her arm before she could begin a new struggle.

"Now you see why I wanted to know if you were going through with it," he whispered. "You *can't*, Penelope! It will be worse than last time . . ."

"No, I *want* to marry him now!"

"When you're in love with some one else?"

"But I'm not! Oh, I can't explain . . . If I'd been the least little bit in love the first time, I shouldn't have broken off the engagement; but I thought I really couldn't marry any one who

trampled on all my pet ideas in the way Robin did. Since then I've seen that all my pet ideas are only fit to be trampled on . . ."

"And that has made you fall in love with him?"

His irony glanced off her without leaving a mark.

"It's removed the chief obstacle. I'm older, too; I feel I've come to life in some way and left my absurd dreams behind . . ."

Morley's grasp of her arm tightened.

"Aren't you missing out something?," he asked.

"I don't think so. If you like, I'll say it was you who made me come to life, but that isn't much consolation. I can't marry you! I'm going to marry Robin . . ."

"You no longer like me in a way you've never liked any other man?"

Penelope shook her head slowly:

"I'm very fond of you, Morley. I should hate to make you unhappy and I hope we shall always be friends . . ."

He dropped her arm and discovered that she was too much preoccupied to notice that he had been holding it.

"After this, you won't see me again. If it's all over . . . You *say* it is . . ." He moved again to the door and stood with bent head. "Will you kiss me good-bye?"

For an instant Penelope hesitated. He was challenging her to shew whether she could in truth transfer to another man the passion which he had kindled. For an instant her eyes seemed

to beg him not to insist on this proof; they saddened as he waited implacably for her answer.

"Yes, if you like," she sighed.

Her fingers slid limply from the mantelpiece, but she did not come to meet him. Morley put his hands on her shoulders and leant forward till his mouth met hers. She stood motionless; and he slipped one arm round her waist, drawing her to him. Unresisting but passive, she allowed him to kiss her cheeks and eyes, while his hands caressed her bare shoulders and back. Though his own heart was beating tumultuously, there was no tremor of response in the still body nor sound from the unmoving lips until she disengaged one arm and begged him not to crush her dress. Then she stood, passive and unresisting as before, until he should confess himself weary.

Morley released her and stooped to pick up her fallen handkerchief. Her mind seemed to be a thousand miles away from him; and, when she spoke, it was to ask the time, as her watch had stopped. She appeared to be unconscious that he had been trying to stir her blood. So a martyr might look at the torturer who had failed to shake her.

"It's eleven o'clock," he muttered. "If I say to-morrow that I've had a letter recalling me to London, will you back me up?"

"If I must. I hope you don't really mean what you said about not coming back. I should miss you . . ."

"Do you really think so?," Morley asked ironically. "Not for long! Your feelings are under such admirable control. Whether it's Allerdyce or me . . ."

At last, a slow-mounting tide of colour told him, he had pierced her insensibility!

"If you're not very careful, you will make me hate you!," she whispered. "You oughtn't to have done what you did, Morley! I oughtn't to have let you, but it seemed the only way of making you see that I'm utterly indifferent." She knelt on a cushion in front of the fire and stretched her hands, with a shiver, to the flames. "It wouldn't have been a success, however much I'd been in love with you. And I *was* once, with what I *thought* was you. Oh, I can't explain, but you've become a stranger to me! I expect it's all my fault. If you think that, if you fancy for one *moment* that I've behaved badly to you . . . Oh, my dear, I'd give anything for this not to have happened!"

3

The straight back was bent, the head drooping. One more round, Morley imagined, would be as much as she could stand.

"I should never dream of saying you've behaved badly," he heard himself telling her. "I only don't understand how any one can be in love one moment and out of it the next."

"You do see, though, that it wouldn't be a success? If you *don't* . . ."

As before, she stopped short; and Morley was left to finish the sentence for himself. She might have been going to say: "*You* will, *in time*"; or she might have been nerving herself to surrender. Watching her white face and listless body, he felt

his pulses throbbing. Ever since he had held her in his arms, he had been blind and savage with a longing that grew fiercer as her deathly indifference denied him assuagement. The fire which he failed to light in her was blowing back on him, but there was hope, after all. "*If you* don't . . ." He wondered how Allerdyce would take this latest change. And how, when, where should the news be broken to the Silchesters? Not to-night, certainly. Not with this oddly unsympathetic house-party in possession. Perhaps not at Silham at all. If he wrote when he got home . . .

Morley found his imagination playing over the scene in Albany Terrace when he announced that he was going to marry. His father, quite certainly, would be hostile, Rose excited, their mother perhaps embarrassingly impressed (sooner or later she would have to be warned against speaking of "*my daughter-in-law Lady Penelope*"). They would all be agog with curiosity to see their new relations and would expect to be invited down to Silham.

It would be better, Morley decided, to arrange the first meeting on neutral ground, at a restaurant, and to restrict it ruthlessly to near relations. When once the engagement had been announced, there would be a crop of difficulties to overcome. As soon as the Tidmans, for example, had tired of their little jokes, they would want to meet Penelope. If he made difficulties, they would ask if they were not "good enough" for her. It was all very well to say that women were more adaptable than men; he could not see Penelope adapting herself to Elizabeth Tidman or Dora. . . .

He looked up to find her turning her head for his answer.

"You *wanted* me to propose," he reminded her. "Yes, you admitted that to Allerdyce! I don't know why you've suddenly changed. You know I should do everything in my power . . ."

"But you don't believe it would be a success," she persisted.

Her eyes looked into his; and he felt that she was watching the pictures that his imagination had just painted. They would not be happy, she seemed to be warning him, if he had to make excuses eternally for the people among whom he had been brought up.

"It wouldn't be a success," he answered bitterly, "if one party was obstinately convinced it must fail. As you think that, for some reason . . ." In the misery of defeat, Morley remembered the resolution which he had taken before there seemed a chance of winning her back. As he could not keep her, he must let her go with an adequate gesture. "I've not been much use to you, I'm afraid. . . . Now I'll say good-bye. I hope you'll be very happy. If you can make your mother believe that I've been recalled to London . . . I *have* had a letter from my publishers which I can shew her . . ."

Next day Morley took the first train that would get him away from Silham in any direction. He had no plans. The farm at Burnham, where he had dreamed his last dreams and written his last pages to the greater glory of Penelope would be insupportable; but he was not expected in Albany Terrace until the end of the week and his

relations would pester him with questions. He was not expected at his office; and Dora, even if she said nothing, would wonder how this new mystery fitted in with the general mystery of his life for the last six months.

Dora . . .

There, if he wanted it, was one quarter in which he could forget for a time the feeling that he was not wanted. Underbred and oversexed, underwashed and overscented, Dora would bring him peace of a kind. To be sure, Allerdyce—with his talk of "idioms" and of "sticking to one's own class"—would think that he was returning where he belonged. Penelope would thank God for her last-minute escape. Neither would understand the urge that sent him back to Dora. Unlike Allerdyce, who was prepared to wait with melancholy patience until Penelope came back to him, and unlike Penelope, who could stand frigidly indifferent while he gripped her in his arms and kissed her lips, Morley was a normal creature of normal passions. If Penelope would not have him, he must find some one who would.

"Even if I have to look for her on the streets . . ."

Only waiting to engage a room at the Great Western Hotel, Morley hastened to the office of the *Literary Review*.

"Mr. Tidman not here yet, I suppose?," he enquired of the commissionaire. "He *is?* Oh!"

A little dashed to learn that his editor was already at work, Morley made his way into the private office, where he found old Uncle laboriously

manipulating a typewriter. There was no sign of Dora; her roll-top desk was shut, her letter-trays empty; and he realized with dismay that she must be ill or on holiday.

"'Morning, Uncle! Anything special for me?," he asked.

Tidman looked up with a frown that quickly vanished in a smile of pathetic thankfulness.

"Morley!," he cried. "My salvation! Can *you* work these damned machines? Miss Welwyn has vanished into thin air. Lend me a hand with these letters, there's a good fellow. And tell me what you're doing in London!"

Morley explained that his publishers wished to see him and then asked with elaborate carelessness whether Dora was ill.

"God knows!," old Uncle sighed. "She's been away for two days. Only a message which somebody else took. By the way, a telegram arrived for you about ten minutes ago."

Morley carried the envelope to the window and opened it with his back to the room. Was Penelope repenting already? Had she hurried after him? He looked first at the end and was startled to see the name "*Allerdyce*".

"*Returning London business two three days*," he read, "*delighted if you can dine Thespian eight thirty no party.*"

4

"*No party* . . . ." Morley repeated to himself.

So Allerdyce wanted to talk with him alone.

He was coming up from Silham on purpose. And much good he would do! It was too late now, even if he brought a message that Penelope had changed her mind again. A mental impression was not to be obliterated by a formula; and they had both decided now that they would not be happy together.

"In other words, we've both become class-conscious."

Though the telegram ended with the words: "*Telephone Albany*", Morley thrust it into his pocket while he looked again at his publishers' letter. They had read his manuscript and were pleased to see that he was working a somewhat different vein. The new book, they predicted rather grudgingly, contained the elements of a popular success and might with luck recoup them for their losses on his earlier ventures. They designed to include it in their next list and hoped to bring it out in the new year. This, they added, was the last novel covered by their present contract; and, if Morley wished to go on with them, they would be happy to consider a fresh agreement. Perhaps, the senior partner suggested, he would talk the matter over one day at luncheon.

"They too think they've got a winner this time," Morley reflected sourly. A week earlier, this letter would have made him radiant. Now he had lost interest; and only the memory of ancient wounds stiffened him in his resolution to drive a hard bargain. "If they want me, they shall have me," he decided, "*at my own price.*"

After telephoning to make an appointment for that day, he helped old Uncle with his letters

until it was time to get ready for luncheon. The occupation kept him from thinking; but, as he walked to the Savoy, his earlier feeling of not being wanted became unbearable. Everybody else seemed to be waiting for some one! These smooth-haired youths and red-lipped girls were jumping up all the time with shrill greetings and then disappearing to little tables where they sat with their heads close together, whispering and touching hands as they looked at the *menu* . . . It was maddening!

His publisher came in breezily and created a brief diversion by loudly ordering champagne. This, Morley knew, meant that, unless he kept his wits about him, he would make a bad bargain. Publishers only ordered champagne for luncheon when they had favours to ask. Not that he greatly cared what kind of bargain he made! The only question of importance was: what had happened to Dora? He had pinned his hopes on her; and now she had failed him!

Perhaps, indeed, it was early to say that: he would go round to her flat after luncheon, Morley determined, and see what was the matter with her. If it were no more than a cold, he would boldly suggest taking her down to Brighton for a few days to shake it off. The new fever in his blood was stronger than shyness or decency. He cared nothing for Dora and was only interested in her illness as a possible bar to her coming away with him. It was like her to knock up just when he wanted her! Well, if she failed him, he would very soon find some one to take her place. Serve her right, too! To forget everybody and every-

thing for three days . . . There should surely be no difficulty in persuading Dora to come away with him. She had been eager enough when he did not require her . . .

Throughout luncheon Morley found his attention wandering from the guarded compliments which his publisher was paying him. Dora would need a little coaxing; he could not pretend that he had not repulsed her rather regularly for the last six months. On the other hand, if she had almost given up hope of him, she ought to fall pretty soon to a little judicious flattery. He had come up, he would say, to arrange about the new book and, hearing she was seedy, he had at once rushed round to enquire. If he might prescribe, what she needed was a change; and, by Jove, so did he! This infernal book! He had been working on it all day and half the night until he had not a whole nerve in all his body. For months he had been nowhere and seen no one. Why, how long was it since they had taken a meal together? Now that he was here, he did not feel much inclined to go back. The people with whom he had been staying were good souls, but it was a stiff, stupid party and he was not sorry to break away. As he had an unexpected three days in hand, why should Dora not spend them with him in a real holiday? She should choose the place; and he would promise her the best of everything. . . .

The publisher was saying that, if the next book did well, they were prepared to increase substantially the amount of the advance under the new agreement.

"I think we'd better leave the question of a

new contract," Morley answered truculently, "until we've seen how the new book sells. I'm out for the best terms I can get. Nothing you'd be prepared to offer me now, in the dark, would tempt me to tie myself up . . ."

"Tell me what you *will* accept," the publisher urged. "Frankly, we don't want to lose you, Darville. We've believed in you and backed our belief . . ."

"Then let me know your best offer," Morley rejoined. "I'm tired of being poor. I want to take a holiday and enjoy life, for a change." At other times he would have been elated to find himself being courted, but he now only wanted to set out in pursuit of Dora. "I have an appointment at the other end of London. If you'll excuse me . . ."

This, by the way, was "success", or the prelude to it!

5

HALF an hour later Morley was running up the stairs to Dora's garret.

At three o'clock in the afternoon the great block of cheap flats, let wholly to wage-earners, wore such an air of desolation as the wage-earners' work-places would wear at three o'clock in the morning, when the pendulum had swung back from east to west and a swarm of clerks and shop-assistants had settled for the night in Fulham and Putney, Chiswick and Turnham Green. Fool that he was, of *course* she would not be here! The

long concrete passages were empty; the uniform olive-green doors were shut as though they would never open again; and even the telephone-bells were silent. Morley caught himself walking on tiptoe; and, when he found Dora's card pinned to her door, he tapped as if he were afraid of being heard.

There was no answer—by now indeed he was expecting none—and he was turning to go when it occurred to him that he might at least leave a note. He tried the handle and was little surprised to find the door yielding. Trust Dora not to trouble about locking anything! Then he halted at a cry, followed by a scurry of feet. The opening door was pushed against him; and he caught sight of Dora with her hair in her eyes, holding an eiderdown about her like a bath-robe.

"Who are you? What d'you want?," she demanded.

"My dear, I hope I didn't startle you!," Morley answered. "It's me. Uncle told me you'd been away from the office; and I came round to see if you were ill . . ."

"Well, you've come at the most inconvenient time you could have chosen," she snapped. "I'm changing my dress . . ."

"But you're all right, I hope? I had to come back earlier than I expected and I wondered if you were doing anything to-night. . . . May I come in and wait, Dora? You can put me in the bathroom till you're ready."

"I won't do anything of the kind! What's the matter, Morley? What d'you want, dropping out of the blue like this?"

"I want you to dine with me . . ."

"Well, I can't! And now I'm afraid I must say good-bye. Will you let go the door? I want to put some clothes on."

"But, Dora . . ."

"No, I mean it! Don't be absurd, Morley. If you really wanted me, you could have taken the trouble to give me a little notice. Bursting in like this without warning . . ."

"You said I could come here whenever I liked."

"Did I? It must be so long ago that I've forgotten it. Please let go the door, Morley! I've had one chill and I don't want another. If you wish to know, I'm going down to the south coast for a few days to recuperate. I *told* Uncle, but he doesn't seem to have taken it in. When I get back . . ."

Morley did not listen to the end of her sentence. His mind was trying to focus three pictures at the same time: Dora within a yard of him, bare-armed and bare-legged, muffled loosely in a purple eiderdown; Dora going off to the south coast, as he had planned, but without him; Dora trying, even if she did not succeed, to shut the door in his face and leave him alone with his agony.

"Let me in, Dora!," he begged. "There's something I want to say . . ."

"If you don't clear out, I'll have you *chucked* out," she screamed in sudden fury.

The shrill voice resounding through the silent passages appalled him. Automatically he fell back. The door was banged to; and a key grated. Bare feet pattered away. A second door opened with

a creak. Dora babbled hysterically. A second, deeper voice answered her.

"So *that's* the game!," Morley whispered and stood silent in amazement at his own obtuseness.

Dora had done that which for months he had been wishing her to do: she had transferred her embarrassing attentions to some one who appreciated them. He himself, henceforth, would mean somewhat less to her than she to him. His isolation was now complete.

"And I thought I had only to whistle . . ."

Morley stumbled into the street and walked blindly until he found himself being pulled by a policeman from the imminent front-wheels of a motor-bus. Was this the King's Road? He walked on with a muttered word of thanks. The Duke of York's School? He walked on, wondering dully who the man was to whom Dora now granted her favours. Eaton Square? He walked on, reflecting idly that every step took him farther away from his luggage and the room which he had engaged at Paddington. Was it only this morning that he had bolted from Silham? He walked on and discovered, as though he had been consciously heading for this all the time, that he was standing in the Albany courtyard.

In the gathering dusk he seemed to hear again the voice of the real Allerdyce. "*Rather pathetic, I thought: so very raw and so very bitter . . . The* farouche *intellectual from the Garden City . . . Absurd whiskers. Fantastic clothes . . . I put him up for a pot-house I belong to, which was short of members . . .*" This was what his "friend"

Allerdyce really thought of him; the friend who had taken a great "*liking*" for him. . . .

Morley strode through to the Ropewalk. If Allerdyce wanted to see him, he should. This was a meeting that had to be faced. Ever since the far-off night of the Critics Club dinner he had been feeling that they would have to fight things out some day. . . .

CHAPTER FOUR

PROFIT AND LOSS

I

"Well, I got your telegram. I couldn't let you know before. I've been on the run all day."

Morley spoke breathlessly, very conscious that Allerdyce was watching him closely. He had meant to stand with arms akimbo, grimly demanding explanations, but he discovered that his voice was unsteady.

"And you've come to say you *will* dine? Capital! I'd given up hope and ordered a scratch meal here, but there'll be enough for two. You'd like a wash, I expect."

Allerdyce led the way to his bathroom and withdrew, returning a few minutes later with a bottle of champagne.

"For a pick-me-up there's nothing like a glass of this stuff, drunk straight off. You've had a hard day and an early start . . ." He untwisted the wire and eased the cork, taking care not to look at his guest's white face and staring eyes. "Penelope told me the other day that you were hunting about for quarters of your own," he continued, as he poured the wine. "I don't know whether you've considered this part of London . . ."

He was obviously talking to hide his nervousness; and Morley, drying his hands to take the proffered glass, was grimly amused to find himself less embarrassed than his host.

"I suppose you'll soon be giving up this place. Are you offering me the reversion?," he asked. "By the way, I've not congratulated you yet. Penelope told me . . ."

"And she gave me your good wishes," Allerdyce interrupted hastily. "I came up at her suggestion. She's rather unhappy, Darville. About you."

Morley drained his glass and turned away to brush his hair. In the looking-glass he could see the reflection of Allerdyce frowning and rubbing his chin. A dark-blue frogged smoking-jacket and a silk shirt with a turned-down collar gave him an odd air of jauntiness, but the lines in his face seemed to be deeper than usual and the melancholy brown eyes more tired. Why *he* should be distressing himself, Morley could not imagine; nor why Penelope should be "unhappy". . . .

"She needn't be," he answered. "After all, she's only discovered, as I warned her all along, that the old prejudices are as strong as ever. I admit it seems a little hard that my reward for pointing out a few things that must be as plain as a pikestaff to every one else is that she thinks I'm suffering from a snob-complex." Morley watched for a change in the troubled face which he could see reflected over his shoulder. As long as he lived he would remember Penelope's confidential verdict on the book which she pretended to admire. "She needn't worry!," he went on. "Nor need you.

After to-night . . . I should dearly like to understand whether this is part of my 'redemption'. You remember, when I first went to Silham . . ."

Allerdyce picked up the champagne-bottle and carried it into his high, panelled dining-room. A second cover had been laid; and the "scratch meal" seemed enough for six.

"We'll wait on ourselves," he decreed. "Everything's cold. . . . I told you the other day that in my humble judgement you were only taking rather too narrow a view of men and books. Can you deny that you found a certain rather agreeable ease about everything in the houses you visited last summer? Heaven knows, I don't suggest that the one way of living is *better* than the other . . . That, on my word of honour, is all I ever had in mind."

2

As he sat down, Morley found himself wondering who had chosen the scarlet-brocade curtains and dove-grey carpet. The silver, of course, with its almost obliterated "A", was a family inheritance; and so probably were the Chippendale chairs and this oval table. Was it Allerdyce himself?

As likely as not! He had been bred to a tradition of taste and surrounded from infancy by beautiful possessions. He took them for granted as he took himself for granted, as all his set took themselves for granted! In a sense, the alien was taken for granted so long as he conformed to their conventions; it was only by accident that

he might hear himself described with patronizing good-nature as coming of rather a narrow, middle-class family.

"There's agreeable ease for those who are born to it," Morley answered brusquely. "When the others find that you *aren't* in the Guards and *don't* hunt and have leanings towards socialism . . ."

Allerdyce smiled wryly:

"I admit that the young subaltern just let loose on society is a pretty tough proposition. With the army training and the mess tradition you can't expect much else. On the whole, though . . . ?"

He paused with an interrogatory smile, as though he were inviting Morley to make out a profit-and-loss account for the last six months. Though he lived outside "the great world", he had been received into it. His romance had rather come to grief, but he had had a romance. If he was paying dearly for the experience, he had at least "widened" his "horizon".

"*I* don't care what kind of house I visit," Morley answered. "So long as I'm not bored . . . And only some one with the mind of a subaltern could think it mattered for a man with work to do. It's different for women, but because I pointed out to Penelope that caste-feeling was as strong as ever . . ."

"I wonder if it *is*," Allerdyce broke in. "With money changing hands, old families dying out, new men coming to the front . . ."

"And yet we're both indebted to you for the phrase about sticking to people who speak your own idiom."

Allerdyce nodded and made a movement with his hand towards Morley's untouched plate.

"You can eat dressed crab?," he asked. "Won't you begin? You know, I use that phrase quite literally. I should murder my wife in cold blood if she said 'phone' for 'telephone'. People don't trouble about breeding, though, as they did even in my young days. Good heavens, there were *taboos* then against Jews and Americans and people in trade! The champions of breeding," he continued reflectively, "got their death-blow when it was found that a few years at a good public-school and a few more in the army, say, turned out an imitation that couldn't be distinguished from the real article. The stalwarts pretended that blood would always tell, but in a thing like the last war people did equally well or badly without regard to pedigree. And the case of the stalwarts is always being given away by their own people when they come croppers over money and women. For some reason it was considered a reproach to be the son of a butcher, but the highest in the land have been marrying the daughters of pork-packers and we all of us hold shares in soap or beer or something of the kind. You mustn't think that Penelope, of all people, ever bothered her head about family-trees and quarterings."

Morley ate in silence. This, then, was the purpose of Allerdyce's hurried journey; to tell him, as though he had not overheard her the day before, that he and not Penelope was the snob.

"God knows what she *does* bother about!," he broke out suddenly. "My unforgivable sin

seems to lie in thinking that a girl like her can't live on three hundred a year."

"Well, I don't know. Half the women you meet to-day seem to sleep in a mews and work in a hat-shop. That Elsie Fildes you saw at Silham in the spring! And Penelope would be the last person to object!"

"The parents might."

"But nowadays, thank God, you marry a man or woman, not the entire family. There's no question of any 'unforgivable sin'! I admit that, if Penelope got it into her head that you were thinking too *much* about her position, it would be a shock to her. . . . However, this is all a digression. You asked me why I wanted you to be friends with the Silchesters. I've told you. If I could have foreseen that this would happen . . ."

Morley found that his glass was being replenished and tried to see the name on the bottle. For all the difference this stuff produced, it might have been barley-water.

"I don't blame you," he answered wearily, "though you've succeeded in uprooting me pretty completely. I can't stand the *old* rut I was in! You and your friends have made me feel I'm too good for it. And I don't need any one to tell me that I'm not good enough for the set you tried to hoist me into."

The bitterness of words and tone caused Allerdyce to flinch. Like Penelope, he seemed to feel that anything could be more easily forgiven than what they were pleased to call "class-consciousness". Maybe they were right and this was one shibboleth that he had not mastered.

Maybe, if he had taken himself for granted instead of recognizing facts and trying to shape them into a tolerable form for Penelope . . .

"In our job, *surely*," said Allerdyce, "the only thing that matters is whether a man is a good enough artist. You and I have nothing in common with the lethal young gentlemen that the Silchesters have collected this week. The fewer roots you have, the better for your work. My advice to you would be: Mix with all classes and belong to none . . . And I'm talking so much that you're getting nothing to eat!"

HURRIEDLY changing the plates, Allerdyce put a cold pheasant on the table and went to open another bottle of wine at the sideboard. As they were only at the end of the fish, Morley wondered how much more he was expected to drink and how much—since his host was still playing with an unfinished glass—he had drunk already. If the stuff had overcome his first exhaustion, it had not yet either dulled or stimulated his brain which was lying dead in a dead world.

"You haven't told me why you wanted to see me," he observed abruptly.

Allerdyce poured from the new bottle before answering. It might be that a drop of wine fell on Morley's shoulder and that he brushed it away; it might be that a hand rested there for a moment in sympathy.

"Can't you guess?," he said. "I'm the only

person in the world who knows how you must be feeling. I should have come on my own account, even if Penelope hadn't sent me. She can't bear to think she's hurt you. She would like to be friends . . ."

"And you think that when you and she are engaged, married . . . ?"

Morley was startled into silence by the rasp in his own voice, but at least he had checked this facile flow of cheap consolation. Allerdyce was like a bloated alderman preaching contentment in a work-house!

"Some of my best friends are married to other men," the bland voice continued after a pause.

"But you were never in love with them! If you had been, you couldn't have borne to see another man kissing them!"

"Oh, if it had been merely physical infatuation . . . ," Allerdyce began with disdain which he did not try to hide.

At last, Morley discovered, the champagne had brought him to life! Springing to his feet with a violence that sent two glasses flying, he pushed back his chair and strode to the fire.

"When you talk like that," he shouted, "I understand you as I never thought I *could!* Your anæmic books! And your vogue with the circulating libraries where your readers are afraid of the crudeness and cruelty of passion, but like to have it hinted at by some one who's as much afraid of it as they are! I understand why you've reached your present age without marrying! I understand how you could go back to Penelope, after she'd turned you down, and languish at her from a dis-

tance and write heart-broken books about her. You hadn't a heart to break or feelings to rouse! A man who talks about 'merely physical infatuation' . . . Shall I tell you what I did this afternoon? I'd had about enough of my own company and I felt that, if I didn't calm down a bit, I should go off my head and begin sticking knives into people. *Merely* physical disorganization, of course! Well, there was a girl I knew, of a forthcoming disposition. I went to see her. It was my idea that we should go off together for a damn-all, rollicking time. I had good reason to think she looked on me with a favouring eye . . ."

Allerdyce had listened in silence and with only a faint flush while Morley attacked him; but, as he threatened to expose himself, he looked up in uncontrollable distress:

"I say, d'you really want to tell me all this?"

Morley held up a shaking hand for silence:

"It should interest you. I seem to remember that you once charged me with being inhuman and laid yourself out to cure me. If we hadn't a 'merely physical' streak, d'you think we should waste a single thought on any woman in creation? They're not worth it! If nine-tenths of a woman's life wasn't 'merely physical', would she dress and undress and powder and scent herself and come near and run away? . . . Well, I paid my call, but I seemed to have chosen an unfortunate moment. There was another fellow before me." Morley sighed with utter exhaustion and returned limply to his place. "Awkward, wasn't it?," he grunted. "Threw my plans out of gear. What to do now I don't quite know. I haven't the heart to try

any more experiments. If I could have got drunk and remained drunk for a week on end . . . I don't know what people are made of when they talk about things being 'merely physical'. They must be asleep or dead. Why, *you* . . ."

He stopped abruptly and emptied his glass. It had been on the tip of his tongue to say: "*You wouldn't have Penelope in love with you now if she hadn't been in love with me first.*" This might be true, so far as it went, but it did not explain why Penelope, after losing her head for a moment, had recovered it. He did not want to be told that she suspected him of feeling a "merely physical" attraction; nor did he care to hear again that he was too much concerned with social distinctions.

Allerdyce was once more changing the plates.

"I'm afraid I must say I'm glad your call ended as it did," he murmured. "And so will you be when you look back on it in cold blood. A calculated debauch without any pretence of affection on either side . . . It's time you began another book, Darville."

"You think I shall ever be able to write again?"

"Yes! And better than before. Until now, you've never had a deep emotion of any kind! *Surface* pains and pleasures . . . You've never been hungry, as I was, or frightened, as we all were in the war. The suffering and death of people you love, as I loved my dear, difficult old father, and your own utter helplessness: you're mercifully too young to know anything about that. And your work, inevitably, is based on what you've observed and not on what you've felt . . ."

"You think there's good 'copy' to be made

out of this?," Morley enquired provocatively. "For me, too?"

4

As well try to coax fire from wet wood! Allerdyce seemed impervious to taunts. With paternal kindliness and a most unwonted lapse into confession, he was explaining to a younger fellow-craftsman how his books had lacked vitality until it was supplied from outside, first by the shock of the war, then by Penelope. He seemed unconscious that his companion was looking for fresh opportunities to insult him. And at intervals he got up to put the cigars on the table and to make coffee and to pour out brandy and to look for matches.

"I telephoned to your people," he observed at a tangent, "but they didn't know your whereabouts. If you're going to spend the night there . . ."

"I'm not," Morley answered. "I've taken a room at the Great Western."

"I can give you a bed here. A railway hotel is a melancholy place when you're by yourself. And to-morrow you can decide whether it wouldn't really be best to finish off your business here and come back to Silham till the end of the week. That's not as mad as it sounds. I too ran away, I too felt happier when I'd come back. Certainly there won't be any demonstrations to distress you. We aren't on those terms. If we *do* marry . . ."

Morley roused with a start from somnolence

induced partly by the gentle flow of his host's voice, partly by the bottle and a half of champagne which he had drunk.

"But it's all settled!," he cried.

Allerdyce murmured something about "more comfortable chairs" and led the way into the next room.

"Penelope has said she'll marry me," he answered, "but I'm not bold enough to promise that she'll be happy with me. What then? You must realize, Darville, that she's had as big a shock as you. She mocked at the more obvious absurdities of life, thinking she could change them. She has found she can't. And life will be what every one told her it would be. For both our sakes she must decide whether she's always going to feel that fate has cheated her out of a romance . . . Do you like this room? It's quiet for working," he broke off.

Morley glanced idly round the high, green-panelled library. This, he knew, had been Allerdyce's London headquarters since the first days of his long success. And now, presumably, he would part with it, closing the most eventful chapter of his life and shutting the door on memories that must now be more faded than the man himself. It was certainly quiet. Morley wondered whether the rent would be within his means. As he was not going to die of spontaneous combustion, he must go on working.

"It's the perfect setting for a best-seller," he answered with a sneer.

"Then you'd better consider whether you wouldn't like to take it on," Allerdyce laughed.

"Penelope believes this new book is going to do well."

"So, apparently, do the publishers. I'm indifferent. In a way, I suppose, it must be fun to gull the public . . ."

Allerdyce stood up with his back to the fire, staring at the ceiling as though he were calling it to testify how much happiness he had enjoyed in the last fifteen years.

"I *wonder* . . . ," he answered slowly. "'*Fifteenth thousand*', '*third large printing*' have a pleasant sound when you're accustomed to think in hundreds, but you have to face the slings and arrows of outrageous critics who think that a popular book is necessarily a bad book. By painful degrees you learn to think that the youthful scribe who can't even spell the names of your characters correctly may conceivably have been in too much of a hurry to form an opinion worth hearing. Your great disillusion, I think, comes from your own familiar friend whom you trusted. As I told you the first time we met, I've heard rich, successful authors arguing in whispers about their friends' sales till I couldn't decide whether their vulgarity was worse than their pettiness. I've heard them sniggering over trivial slips in a way that made me wonder if they knew that Shakespeare gave Bohemia a sea-board. I don't know that I'm unduly sensitive, but I couldn't stand all the carping and intriguing that I found going on. I cut adrift from my fellow-writers . . . and was promptly told that I evidently thought myself too good for them! You'll have to go through all that if you're to enjoy what people call 'the sweets

of success'. I wonder if you'll be able to stand it any better!"

5

MORLEY stared at the fire without speaking. Success might turn to ashes in his mouth, but Allerdyce seemed convinced that he was going to taste it.

"I shan't complain," he declared, "if I'm treated as fairly as I've tried to treat other people. You may think—old Tidman certainly does—that I've gone for you pretty savagely in my time . . ."

"I bear no malice," said Allerdyce, smiling.

"I only attacked you when I thought you were giving less than your best, or when you seemed to be trading on your position. Why you should think it necessary to publish a new book, well or ill, wet or fine, every year or six months . . . It isn't as though any of you needed the money so desperately."

Allerdyce smiled again before answering:

"You shall tell me how you feel about that in five or six years' time, if we're both alive then. Your enemies—and you'll find a crop of them when you begin to go ahead—will say that you're writing because you have to keep your name before the public, because you live extravagantly, or even because you've written yourself out and are making hay of wet grass before any one else sees that your sun has gone in. Any or all of these things may be true. Heavens, the agony of feeling that you've

run dry! I suppose every one goes through that! Again and again! Until the day when he finds it's true . . . Yes, you'll get a panic over that, Darville, and another when you feel that you're turning out better work than ever before and that—for some reason—your public's leaving you. The most important thing in life then will seem to be to keep your name before the public. Needless to say, you'll be accused of self-advertisement if you so much as address a meeting on behalf of the National Playing-Fields Association. You asked, I think, if it was *amusing* . . ."

He spoke with a tartness that Morley had not heard before.

"You told me my one hope was to work . . ."

"But I don't want my *worst* enemy to be labelled as a best-seller! I suppose my own days are numbered, but I hope no one will ever say that the mantle of Mr. Robin Allerdyce has fallen on Mr. Morley Darville. . . . Our job would be a *really* amusing one if we could carry it on in private! Alas, we need to know what the world thinks of our efforts! *I* go on writing because I can't help myself. I have stories I must tell, however crudely, characters I must get on paper, however clumsily. And you, too? . . . Now I feel rather like Bishop Blougram at the end of his somewhat ample apology!

'You will not wait for that experience, though,
I fancy, howsoever you decide,
To discontinue—not detesting, not
Defaming, but at least—despising me!'

You're going to run the same course, Darville, through the same dust, to gain the same palm at the end; and you're going to stare at it with the same indifference. Now I think it's time I packed you off to bed. This fever of the blood . . . It's the least important thing in life, though it seems—at the time—the biggest."

Morley sat without speaking till a softly-closing door told him that he was alone. Then he sprang up, only to sink slowly back until some one should tell him what to do next. "*This fever of the blood* . . ." He could never get Penelope out of his mind. He was to spend the next half-dozen years of his life writing romances in what the Tidman set derisively called "the wistful vein which we have come to associate with Mr. Allerdyce's later work". He was being invited to write them in Mr. Allerdyce's old chambers at the inspiration of Mr. Allerdyce's new bride. What he himself had called "anæmic books", securing him a vogue with circulating libraries where his readers, afraid of the crudeness and cruelty of passion, flocked to have it hinted at by some one as frightened of it as themselves . . .

He seemed to remember staggering here to-night . . . or in some other life . . . to have things out with Allerdyce. And by some irony of fate he was finding in Allerdyce the one man who could offer him friendship, understanding, guidance! Dora would be amused at that! Dora . . .

Penelope . . .

If he were not too full of drink to escape even now and find some woman who would come home with him . . .

The door opened again; and Allerdyce laid a hand on his shoulder:

"Ready to turn in, old man?"

EPILOGUE

EPILOGUE

SHADED from the sun and screened on three sides from the gusts of a dying mistral, Penelope sat on the verandah of the Villa Chaminade, looking across a golden slope of mimosa to the distant Mediterranean. Behind her, the foot-hills of the Esterel range, grey-green in the February sunshine, rose and dropped and rose again, above the tree-line, to the rusty-red, barren crests half-way between Saint Raphaël and Cannes. Beyond the *maquis* and short of the cliff-road, visible at intervals between the cuttings, ran the railway; and the warning screech of an engine was intermittently followed by a roar of racing wheels as a fore-shortened train rocked for a moment into view.

With the aid of field-glasses Penelope could read the white direction-boards on the side of the coaches: *CALAIS-VENTIMILLE* and *PARIS-VENTIMILLE*, *PARIS-NICE* and *PARIS-SAN REMO*. She had already marked the train that brought the English mail. Now she was waiting for the Calais "Blue" and, half-an-hour later, the arrival of her mother. Robin had motored into Saint Raphaël; and, as the rooms were ready, her letters written and the papers read, Penelope was without occupation.

She turned lazily to the pile of envelopes which Robin had thrust into her hands before leaving. The first contained news-cuttings; but, as he had already received the principal reviews of his latest book, she gave them only a perfunctory glance until her attention was caught by the name of Morley Darville. A comparison of Mr. Darville's work with that of Mr. Allerdyce had caused the agency to include this cutting in a batch to which it did not properly belong. As the article was entitled *The Formula For Popularity*, Penelope judged that the comparison would be made ingeniously offensive to both men. How those "high-brow" critics hated other people to succeed!

"*Mr. Darville's latest novel will arouse feelings of disappointment in those who hoped that he was artist enough to resist the lure of big sales and facile triumphs. In its mixture of sentimentality and cynicism he seems to have taken Mr. Robin Allerdyce as his model; and—the public being what it is—we fear he will make all of Mr. Allerdyce's appeal to those who like being hit below the intellect. Women readers may wonder whether he knows any more of their sex than his distinguished master. He writes of them at once with greater bitterness and more servile adulation, reminding the present reviewer of a man who throws his boots at a cat that will not come and be stroked. These society novelists, if they draw on their own experience, have a hard time with their exalted sirens! Uncertain, coy and hard to please, Mr.* Darville's Lady Cynthia *leads him or his unheroic hero as maddening a dance as ever Mr. Allerdyce suffered from his* Princess Olga's *and* Lady Mirabel's

and Honourable Jane's. *Evidently you take your sanity in your hand when you go courting the daughters of the nobility, or that one of them who has figured in so many of Mr. Allerdyce's later books and has now apparently been lent 'with his kind permission' to play on Mr. Darville's stage . . .*"

Penelope found her cheeks warming. If this was "criticism", small wonder that Robin felt little respect for critics! The notice, which was signed "D. W." continued in the same vein for the best part of a column.

"The *Literary Review* must be hard up for 'copy'!," she exclaimed contemptuously.

That phrase about the siren whom Robin had bequeathed to his literary successor made her vaguely uncomfortable. She hoped that Morley had not been paying her the questionable compliment of another gratuitous portrait, but she had hardly seen him alone since he bounded into fame a year ago. D. W's phrase about his bitter attitude to women opened up uncomfortable possibilities; and that other phrase, about his "Lady Cynthia's" being lent with Mr. Allerdyce's kind permission . . . These Grub Street hacks were never so knowing as when they fancied that they had discovered the original of some characters in a novel! One or two of them had been impertinently speculating for the last year whether Mr. Allerdyce's marriage would inspire him to a new model.

Penelope's musing was interrupted by the scream of a whistle; and she looked down in time to see a streak of dark-blue checkered by grey from the trees to the side of the permanent way.

Was this the Calais or the Paris train? She had hardly framed the question before it was answered by the note of a horn; and she hurried through the hall as a car wound slowly up the ascent from Saint Raphaël.

"I insist on a bath before I even kiss you," Lady Silchester announced through the window. "Run indoors, darling! I don't want to be seen. It didn't matter for Robin, as he'd been through the war and was used to horrors . . ."

"You can't do anything till your registered luggage arrives," Penelope answered, "so it's no good being self-conscious. And you look *perfectly* fresh! Did you have a good journey?"

"Excellent! I slept like the dead. Oh! And, my dear!, who d'you think I travelled out with? Morley Darville!"

Lady Silchester allowed herself to be coaxed out of the car and, protesting that she never drank between meals, accepted without hesitation the glass of vermouth which Robin brought her.

"I've just been reading a review of his new book," said Penelope. "How was he?"

"Very well! And *most* charming. We dined together and gossiped about old times. I think success has improved him."

"Did he say where he was going?," asked Robin. "I should like to get him here for a meal."

"He's starting at Saint Remo and working back. Monte Carlo, Juan-les-Pins and Cannes . . ."

"Our poor popular novelists!," Robin laughed. "So much incense on so many altars!"

Penelope's eye was caught by the cutting from

the *Literary Review* and she turned to Robin with an air of faint combativeness.

"Are you being just the least little bit catty?," she asked. "It sounded as though you grudged him his success."

"God forbid! I always said it would be the making of him."

"As a man? You don't take him seriously as a writer, I know."

Allerdyce bent over his wife's chair and kissed her cheek:

"That's not quite fair, Penelope. Time—and time *alone!*—will shew which of us is going to live. I was thinking of the talks I used to have with him while he was still unknown. I wondered how much he was enjoying his present giddy heights."

"He had no complaints to make last night," said Lady Silchester, "except that he was in need of a holiday."

"Which he'll never get," Robin muttered. "As I warned him . . . He must keep in the public eye, make hay while the sun shines, satisfy himself—as each new book becomes harder to write—that he isn't losing his powers. He must save and invest. What a life it is! . . . Your luggage is being taken up, *madre*, if you want to change."

Lady Silchester jumped to her feet.

"Penelope calls it self-consciousness, I call it self-respect. I shan't be happy till I've had a bath," she declared. "Good-bye for the present, children. If you want Morley's address, he's staying with the Wansboroughs. I believe the

duchess was on our train, but I didn't see her. Will somebody tell me which my room is?"

Penelope accompanied her mother indoors and came back, five minutes later, to the veranda.

"Shall we ask Morley to come over from Cannes?," she enquired. "If he can fit us in with his dukes," she added.

"Who's being a cat now?," Robin taunted her. "Yes, have him by all means! I'm fond of Morley. Did you say his new book was out?"

"There's a notice in the *Literary Review*. By somebody who dislikes him and you about equally! D'you know anybody with the initials D. W.?"

"I should think that's Miss Dora Welwyn. *You* know: daughter of the man who writes all the bad books. I met her once or twice with Morley when she was secretary and maid-of-all-work to Tidman, the editor. I rather fancy she was in love with Morley at that time."

"And he didn't reciprocate her feeling? I should say she's a spiteful young person."

"The first time we met I thought Morley *had* a certain tenderness for her. Then, my dear, you drove her very completely out of his head! She took up with another man, or several other men. She's that kind. None of the old-fashioned nonsense about marrying and having children."

"Is she attractive?"

Robin wrinkled his nose in an expression of fastidious distaste:

"For those who like faces to be painted rather than washed. I should call her thoroughly depraved, but I'm afraid depravity has a certain fascination for some people. It makes an easy approach

for men who are shy and curious at the same time; and I always feel there was a good deal of Kipling's puppy about Morley when we first knew him. He would lick the blacking off people's boots simply because he knew no better. By the way, I had just a word with him this morning as he helped your mother out of the train. He enquired after you."

Penelope nodded her acknowledgements:

"Did you tell him I was well?"

"I did. Taking things rather quietly for the present, I said. That rather startled him. He didn't seem to have realized that when people marry . . ."

Penelope smiled to herself and picked up the bundle of cuttings.

"Do you think he was saying that this would be a final barrier between us?," she asked. "I don't want him to go *on* writing books about me."

"If you've been the means of making him a success, you mustn't complain. As I've told you again and again, the trouble with young writers is that they've usually nothing to write about."

"I'm not sure, though, that I want to become a fixed shadow lying across his books as I lay across yours, Robin! I'm not a *femme fatale*, I'm a very ordinary human being: a wife, shortly to become a mother . . ."

"With a most disabling power, my dear, of knocking a man end-ways if he happens to fall in love with you. I speak from experience."

Penelope looked out over the undulating sea of mimosa.

"But d'you suppose Morley was ever really in love with me?," she asked. "We were a thrilling discovery to each other! At last, at *last* I seemed to have met a man who was free from all the prejudices I most loathed. And I suppose it all seemed rather wonderful to Morley if he was only used to the suburban life which he described so diabolically well in that book he dedicated to me. I can smell the cabbage and linoleum to this day! . . . Silham. And the damsel in distress waiting to be rescued . . . We were both of us ridiculously romantic; but I didn't realize how foolish we were being till that book opened my eyes. Being quite fairly in love with him didn't make it any better. If he'd asked me to live on love in a Chelsea attic, I should have done it. So long as you have enough to eat, I think clothes and addresses are so unimportant. It was the insane value he set on these things that choked me off. I know, poor dear, he was saying that only the best was good enough for me, but whether he was ever what *I* should call in love with me I don't know."

"And I don't think it really matters now," said Robin. "If you don't regret marrying me . . ."

Penelope beckoned him to her side and drew his head down till she could kiss him.

"I only regret that I inadvertently and unavoidably made poor Morley rather unhappy," she answered. "I don't regret keeping you waiting. I feel that was necessary while I was still half-asleep. And while I resented you, in spite of all your sweetness. And while I imagined that the world could be run by pure reason . . . If you'd

told me then that I should spend my honeymoon at Cannes or that we should devote our spare time in looking for a villa here for me to have my first baby in . . . I suppose this *côte de luxe* really *is* the most unreal place in Europe! I don't mind that as I once did." She raised her head to kiss him again. "I know I'm a coward and a deserter. My social conscience is still as active as ever, but I'm too weak-willed to set the world right. As you and Morley pointed out, when I grumbled most at Silham, I never *did* anything."

Robin took her hands and sat down on a cushion by her chair.

"The only way of reforming the world," he told her, "is for every one to put his soul into the thing he does best. Aren't we both doing that? This revolt against social conventions . . . I worked through my rebel days when I was even younger than Morley; but, when I'd got what I wanted—liberty to do my own work in my own way—, I gave up. But, then, I'm *not* Bohemian. Half-an-hour a year with a young person like Miss Welwyn is all that I can bear. I honestly believe you'd have found it the same . . ."

"As I honestly believe that Morley has." Penelope sighed and looked across the slope of mimosa to the gleaming metals of the railway. "If you'd told him two years ago that the first-fruits of his success would include a ticket on the Blue Train to carry him down to the Duke of Wansborough, I feel he would have been very scornful. Are you going to read his new book?"

Robin shook his head:

"I don't mind buying a copy, but I haven't enough faith in his talent to read any more of him. What does the *Literary Review* say?"

Penelope handed him the cutting and watched his expression as he read.

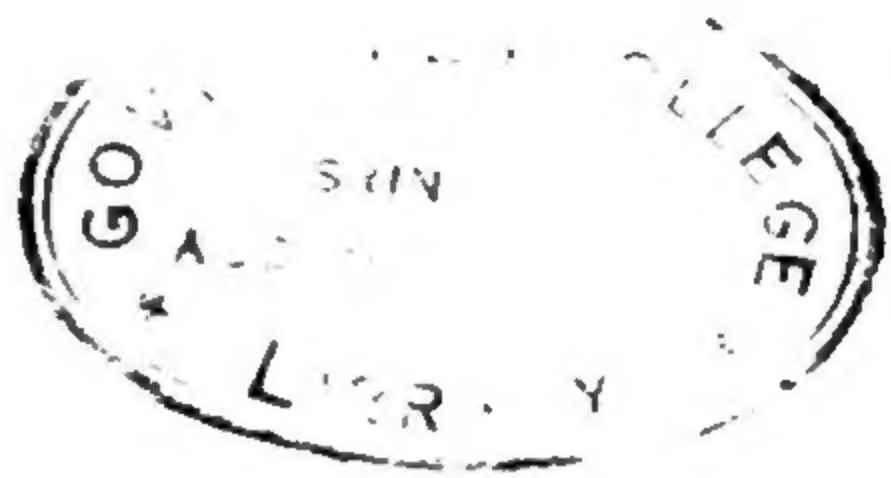
"Oh, this is Mistress Dora, without question," Robin murmured after a few moments. "She pitches it pretty strong . . . Well, Morley was not famed for tenderness when *he* was reviewing. . . . There's a certain irony in his succeeding at a job that he reviled so bitterly when other people handled it. The society novelist . . . '*Like his great exemplar*'—is that me?—'*Mr. Darville knows the inflation-value of a title* . . .' Poor Morley! And what infuriates this young woman is that she knows, whatever she may do to stop it, the book is going to sell! Yes! I was waiting for this! '*The mantle of Mr. Allerdyce seems to have fallen on Mr. Darville* . . .' Well, he can't say I didn't warn him!"

Penelope reached forward and snatched the paper from her husband's hand.

"I can't imagine that he or you will pay the slightest attention to anything this malicious little creature chooses to say!," she cried.

"There's a certain truth to be extracted from the malice," Robin answered. "If Miss Welwyn had only thought of it, she could have coined a phrase even more wounding than the one about my old and threadbare mantle. This review is intended as an obituary on the Morley Darville that she loved and believed in. How much more satisfying to herself and offensive to him if she'd

treated it as an announcement of a birth! '*With the publication of Mr. Morley Darville's* Disillusion, *another popular novelist has been born.*' When you've called a man a popular novelist, you've said all that a self-respecting high-brow editor would think fit to print."



THE END

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